

Chapter 1 – The Dark Lord's Prisoner

"Damn you, Albus," Harry thought as waves of agony coursed through his body. "Damn you, your kind grandfatherly act, your secrets and your thrice-cursed Order of the Phoenix," the litany ran through his mind as he tried to focus on anything other than his bloodstained and broken body.

The Order followed Albus like sheep following their leader to slaughter. Albus believed in everyone's redemption, so rather than pre-emptive strikes on known Death Eaters, the Order only responded to attacks once they were set in motion. The enemy sought out and murdered the supporters of the Light while the Order debated the morality of killing the enemy. Captured Death Eaters bribed their way into acquittals and yet their victims were left with no such reprieves. "Innocents might be hurt; we must not sink to their level," the aged wizard rebuked Harry when he proposed destroying known Death Eater properties and assets to remove their funding of Voldemort's crusade.

He also blamed Albus for his own capture; he had warned the man of the visions that showed Voldemort was planning to capture him, but Albus was confident that Harry would be kept safe while hunting for horcruxes as long as he never stayed in the same spot overnight and avoided using his own wand. "You must keep searching, my dear boy," he insisted. "We cannot prevail as long as a single horcrux remains."

The search for Voldemort's horcruxes had become a full-time undertaking for several people. Hermione once again came up with a method to communicate to those searching when a horcrux was found. She had charmed medallions similar to the DA coins they used in their Fifth Year. The medallions were spelled to be invisible when worn, but would vibrate when a horcrux had been found, heat up when one was destroyed or become visible when all of them had been eradicated.

He was still embarrassed at how easily the Death Eaters had captured him. He had been exhausted, cold and wet when he finally camped for the night. He placed a few wards around his camp site and had then collapsed into dreamless sleep only to awaken to a wand in his throat.

That had been weeks ago from what he could tell, but the continual agony with which he lived made it difficult to tell. "Harry Potter," hissed the Dark Lord when the teen had been thrown to the ground before him, "what a pleasure to have you join us. I was just telling my faithful that we needed some new entertainment. In fact, our newest members need training in casting the cruciatus curse."

"Tom, I would like to say it's a pleasure to see you, but your face tends to give me the creeps," Harry taunted with as much bravado as he could muster.

The snake-like face didn't show the anger that Harry expected, but an almost pleased smile pulled at the thin lips. "I look forward to speaking with you in another week, Mr. Potter. By then you will have an in-depth understanding of both terror and torment."

He was right, the bastard. Day after day, the Death Eaters played with the teen. They took bets on how long it would take until he screamed, how long until he cried, how long until he begged them to stop, and until he begged for death. He learned that continual agony was a shattering emotion that paralyzed and devastated the soul. They brought him to the brink of death and then healed his injuries only to begin again. By the end of the second week, when he was collapsed into exhausted sleep, the nightmares of the torture and the laughter of the Death Eaters mixed into a horrendous serenade with lurid crescendos until he woke to his own guttural screams.

"Damn you, Albus," he thought again hazily. "I'm not going to live to see Voldemort vanquished a second time. He's tired of his 'toy' and isn't going to heal me this time." He no longer hoped for a rescue or a miracle. He just wanted the pain to stop so that he could rest. His cell door opened and the teen opened bleary pain-filled eyes to see Voldemort enter his cell.

"It is time, Harry Potter. I was going to offer you to Lucius Malfoy as a gift, but I am a selfish man. I want the pleasure of ending your life myself before your heart permanently fails." He twirled his wand through his fingers and smiled cruelly at the tormented young man lying in his own blood and filth.

Harry was vaguely surprised he felt only a nebulous sense of relief at the Dark Lord's words. He tried to take a deep breath, but his broken ribs prevented it. Through the pain, he sat up straight against

the cold stone wall. He felt a warmth on his chest and looked down in confusion. "Oh, the medallion," he remembered. "Another horcrux has been destroyed." To his surprise, the golden medallion was visible against his chest. He fought through the haze of pain trying to remember what that meant, but his mind was difficult to focus. "The last horcrux? Are they all gone? Is he mortal again?"

Voldemort thought the brat was hallucinating or perhaps begging for relief when his cracked lips moved soundlessly, and leaned over him to hear his last words with a malicious pleasure. He was taken back when the young man looked at him with what could only be described as weary compassion. "Tom, we all die," he said softly. "But all of your life, you've been too afraid to face it, haven't you?" He looked at the enraged older man with wonder and then understanding slowly crossed his face. "But it's not really death that you're afraid of, is it?"

Voldemort's red eyes narrowed in fury as he hissed, "I am Lord Voldemort and I am afraid of nothing!"

Harry responded gently, "You're afraid of being nothing, of not mattering. You're afraid that you will be forgotten and that all your grand plans will crumble to dust. So you've done all this," he swept his damaged arm tiredly around the room, encompassing not just the dungeon, but indicating all of Voldemort's actions. "I'm sorry for you, Tom."

Harry focused all of his will, strength and magic into his broken right hand and with a lightening stroke that belied his pain, he stabbed it into Voldemort's chest. His shattered hand closed around a thick wet mass and he withdrew it, ripping out the other man's still beating heart. Shock, pain and terror raced across the older man's face before he shuddered and collapsed.

With a deep and overwhelming relief, Harry watched as the red eyes met his. His scar suddenly broke open and blood poured down his face, blocking his vision as even more pain filled his mind. Memories began pouring into his mind, scores then hundreds and then thousands of memories inundated the teen as the two were briefly connected by the Dark Lord's death. The suffering reached a new plateau and was more than the teen could endure. Just before the blackness claimed him, he felt a tug similar to a port key and

wondered if that was something Hermione had done to the medallions without telling him.

Five Hogwarts students stood at the points of a pentagram, outlined in chalk and protected by salt on the floor. The long and complicated chant needed to summon their champion was intricate and needed all of their concentration. At the appropriate time, they turned to Neville and waited for him to cut himself and drip the blood in the inner boundaries of the five-pointed star. He looked at them in dismay and glanced wretchedly at the silver dagger that was across the room. None of them could leave their positions to retrieve it and casting a spell to summon the dagger would ruin the spell already begun.

One of the other dark-haired teens suppressed a growl of irritation and reached for his belt buckle. He cut his own hand on the metal buckle and dripped the requisite drops of blood into the pentagram. The bushy-haired girl across from him frowned, but together the five began their chanting again. They felt the magic grow around them as an invisible wind whipped their robes and hair and the runes on the pentagram began to glow. The pressure built until it was difficult to draw a breath and continue the incantation. With an earsplitting crack of thunder and a blinding flash of light, the pressure was abruptly released and a large object fell into the center of the pentagram.

The five students stared in horror at the bloody and gruesome body now occupying the pentagram. One of the teens broke free from the shock and ran out of the room to the nearest fireplace. He threw in a handful of Floo powder and shrieked, "Headmaster's Office, Hogwarts!"

Author's Note: Since the introductory chapter was so short, I'm publishing the second chapter right away. After this, it will likely be a weekly publication schedule, typically on the weekends.

Chapter 2 – Broken and Bloodied

A dozen members of the Order of the Phoenix were meeting in Albus Dumbledore's office when the fireplace flared green and the panic-stricken teenaged voice of Sebastian Potter bawled, "Mom! Dad! Help! We need help here! We need Madame Pomfrey, if possible. Please, hurry!"

The head withdrew and the flames returned to normal even as James and Lily Potter rushed towards for the fireplace. The other adults looked at one another in uneasy concern and made to follow, although Poppy stepped in front of them once the Potters had left, threw some powder in and called "Infirmary, Hogwarts". "I'll get my bag and Floo from the Infirmary," she said calmly as she stepped through.

Poppy Pomfrey was a stern and professional woman who served as the Matron and nurse in charge of the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry Hospital wing. After decades taking care of the students and staff who suffered mishaps and injuries during the school year, she was adept at stabilizing even the most traumatic of injuries in highly stressful situations, even unexpected home calls during the Winter Holidays. She quickly picked up her emergency kit that contained the potions and supplies needed for most magical and mundane injuries and then called out, "Potter Cottage, Godric Hollow, Wales", the preferred home of the Potters.

She stepped through into a receiving room, pleased and a bit relieved to see Lily Potter waiting for her. "The children are downstairs," the auburn-haired beauty said, her calm effectively masking the concern in her emerald eyes. She led the Matron down to what appeared to be a storage room in the basement. Several teens were huddled against the wall while two adults, James Potter and Albus Dumbledore, were scanning a bloody body on the floor.

Poppy noted that the body was in the center of a pentagram drawn on the floor, and vaguely recognized runes for strength and success along with a variety of others that she couldn't identify, but she set that knowledge aside in her mind for later. The adults moved aside

to let the Matron reach the patient. She noted he was a young male, his body barely covered by rags, saturated in blood and showing obvious signs of significant injuries if the twisted limbs were any indication.

She cast a diagnostic spell and then shook her head in dismay at the results. She looked around the room and breathed a sigh of relief at seeing the Hogwarts Potions Master now in attendance. "Severus, I'll need your help administering potions while I heal the life-threatening injuries," she said tersely. "Blood replenisher and a bezoar just in case, then the strongest healing potion we have. I didn't bring anything for the cruciatus and he's been under it repeatedly." She looked at his bloody right hand and murmured, "Odd, most of the blood on the hand isn't his own," causing the others to look at her in surprise. It looked like he had dipped the misshapen hand into a vat of blood. "Almost every joint in his body has been dislocated and there are breaks in almost every bone. His lung has been punctured, his spleen is ruptured and his kidneys bruised. I'm not sure how he's even alive at this point."

Albus transfigured a table into a bed and Poppy levitated the body off the cold floor, with a nod of acknowledgement to the Headmaster. The other members of the Order quietly lined the walls, ready to help as needed. Once the elderly wizard saw that Poppy and Severus had the emergency healing in progress, he turned to the students and listened as James asked the pertinent questions.

Ron Weasley, Neville Longbottom, Hermione Granger and the Potter twins, Holly and Sebastian, were staring at the broken form with bewildered and distraught expressions. As the Senior Auror stepped forward, he drew their troubled eyes. James looked at each of the teens, assessing their expressions and then directed his attention to his own twins. His normally genial face was carefully neutral, although his brown eyes were hard as he said curtly, "Explain."

"We attempted to summon a hero to defeat Lord Slytherin," explained his son weakly. "We thought the ritual would bring us a champion, maybe a warrior-mage." He looked at the gruesome blood-stained form with apprehension. "Dad, we never thought this would happen. Please believe us!"

James looked at his twins in surprise. Whatever he was expecting, that wasn't it. "But why did you attempt this at all, much less without discussing it with your parents? That was irresponsible and exposed all of you to unknown dangers. You could have lost control of the spell and drained your cores!"

Neville Longbottom spoke up hesitantly, "They did it for me, Mr. Potter. I'm no hero, sir. I can barely manage an Acceptable in DADA. Everyone expects me to have some untapped power that will defeat the Blood Purists, but it's not true. I can't do it." Frank Longbottom stepped over to his son, laid a hand on the teen's shoulder and squeezed it gently. It was true that after Neville miraculously survived an attack that imploded their house wards, the general populace seemed to think he had been marked as their knight in shining armor, someone set apart with a pre-ordained destiny.

Hermione Granger took a step forward and added determinedly, "I had been researching anything and everything I could that would give Neville a fighting chance if Slytherin comes after him. I even began researching ways to find or summon a familiar for him." Albus felt reluctant admiration at the thought of finding a familiar to strengthen their unwilling hero. "That's when I came across this spell," continued the young woman. "It required five casters acting in unison with a single focus. The translation indicated that the spell would summon someone who could fulfill the need the casters focus on. If there was ever a reason to need a hero, defeating Slytherin seemed like a good reason. We thought the Winter Holidays would be good, since we would have time to explain things and help make plans before we had to return to school."

While Lily was willing to let her husband ask questions appropriate for an Auror, she was a mother and by Circe she wanted answers. "Do I understand that what you're telling us is that you five decided to perform an arcane ritual without adult approval or supervision? How did you determine the amount of power the spell would need? How did you know that you five could supply that power? How did you know that you wouldn't drain your magical cores? How did you think we as your parents would respond to you abducting someone?"

The teens began to hang their heads as Lily's voice dropped to a whisper that was even more terrifying than a shouting rant. "Did it even occur to you that you were summoning a sentient being that

might not be sympathetic to your request? Or that your spell didn't specify the parameters of his health?"

Hermione was blushing fiercely, but said meekly, "The spell constraints did specify that it had to be someone who wanted to leave his or her current situation. We thought that meant they would be sympathetic..." She stopped speaking as Lily raised an eyebrow and dropped her eyes. "We thought we had considered the parameters. We even planned to use Neville's blood so that the hero would be attuned with his requirements."

Gasps were heard from the adults and even Albus closed his eyes briefly. Using blood in a ritual was typically considered dark magic. "You used my son's blood in the summoning?" demanded Frank Longbottom as he gripped his son's shoulder tightly.

Neville shifted uncomfortably and turned to look at his father. "Well, we planned to, but I left the ritual dagger across the room. We couldn't leave our positions or use a summoning spell to get it, so...um..." his voice trailed off.

Alice looked at her son's discomfort and asked quietly, "So what did you do, Neville? Continue without the blood?"

"Umm, no Sebastian used his belt buckle to cut his hand and dropped the blood into the pentagram," Neville finished in a hurry.

Lily and James looked at one another as a chill ran down their spines. What that would mean to the focus of the ritual would have to be researched, but knowing that their son's blood had been used in anything this powerful was disturbing to say the least.

It took over four hours of non-stop potions, spells and even mundane bandaging before Poppy felt the young man was stable enough to be moved to the Hogwarts Infirmary via Floo. Once there, she began an in-depth diagnostic charm, allowing the results to be automatically recorded via animated quill onto a scroll. The scratching of the plume continued for a long time, as she evaluated her patient. He appeared to be in his late teens or early twenties with ragged black hair and had three long scars from the right side of his forehead down the cheek and ended just below his chin,

almost as if he had been clawed. The marks went over the orbital bone, and she wondered whether he had lost the sight in that eye.

She turned to the parchment as the scratching stopped and realized that it had simply used all available space on the scroll. She set up a second one shaking her head in dismay that it was needed and reactivated the spell. This spell listed all injuries, illnesses and conditions from birth forward and she began to read the patient's history with all the intensity of a dedicated healer.

For the first fifteen months, the child appeared to have experienced a normal childhood. Her eyes widened at the first significant injury. The boy had been on the receiving end of the Avada Kadevra curse! She shook her head in disbelief. He must have been in the backwash of it she decided, or perhaps he had been held by someone who was killed by the Unforgiveable.

Almost immediately after that, his health began to change dramatically. That would make sense if his primary caregiver had been killed. From the time he was a toddler, he began to show indications of either extreme rough-housing or else deliberate physical abuse. Considering malnutrition also began around the same time, she speculated that he had been moved to an abusive home after his caregiver was killed.

She saw magical exhaustion many times during his childhood, particularly after more severe physical injuries, and she had to believe that his accidental magic had helped heal him of his injuries. Every year showed ongoing malnutrition, barely escaping being defined as starvation. She noticed degradation to his eyesight and surmised the lack of appropriate nourishment had led to the damage. She made a mental note to bring a vision specialist in to examine his eyes.

Starting around eleven years old, more serious injuries began. She saw that all of the bones in one arm had been removed and re-grown. Poor boy, he was familiar with the painful process then. She was going to have to re-grow most of the bones in his limbs over the next few days. Multiple low level hexes and jinxes recorded in his history indicated he had likely attended a magic school. Merlin knew the children at Hogwarts hexed one another often enough when the teachers weren't looking.

Her eyes widened again when she read a reference to a basilisk bite at the age of twelve. How in Merlin's name had he been exposed to a basilisk? Her mouth dropped open when she saw not only the Imperius curse, but an injury from a dragon at fourteen, hypothermia, a knife wound and then the Cruciatus curse. "He was only fourteen," she whispered in horror. "Merlin, all three Unforgiveables!"

The quill stopped scratching again and she shook her head when she realized yet another parchment was needed. She had never seen a patient that needed three scrolls, not even Aurors or curse-breakers when she was in training at St. Mungos.

It was the damage over the last month that made her stomach turn and she had to take a stomach calming potion to prevent herself from becoming physically ill. He had been put under Cruciatus almost daily. Bone-breaking curses had hit every major bone. His shoulders, elbows, fingers, knees and toes had all been dislocated. Diffindo and Confringo had been liberally applied on a regular basis. He had been subjected to strong hallucinogens, including one illegal potion that made the person relive their worst nightmare while their body showed the physical effects of what the imbiber encountered in the dream state. And then it appeared he had been healed so that the process could begin again.

The three scars across his face were revealed to be claw marks, apparently from a werewolf. How he had avoided being bitten, she wasn't certain. Perhaps the werewolf had been under the effect of the Wolfbane potion so knew not to bite, but still helped torture the young man who the parchment indicated was only nineteen years old.

As soon as his system could handle it, she was going to dose him with Dreamless Sleep to banish and re-grow the broken and shattered bones so that he didn't have to suffer through the pain while awake. She would have to consult a nerve specialist at St. Mungos, but would likely need to have Severus brew strong nerve repair potions to counter all of the Cruciatus he had suffered. Her concern was that even if the physical damage could be repaired, she wasn't certain whether he would be permanently impaired mentally.

She looked up briefly from her review of her patient when Dumbledore and James Potter come into the Infirmary. The younger

man was in his Auror robes, so was obviously there in an official capacity. "How is he Poppy," asked Albus.

"As well as anyone could be who's been abused all of his life and then methodically tortured for the last month. I've never seen anyone survive everything this poor young man has. He's been exposed to all three Unforgiveables and was even bitten by a basilisk!"

"No one can survive the Killing Curse," said James in confusion.

"He was only a toddler, so my guess is that a parent was holding him when they were struck with it and he was in the backslash. His physical abuse began only after that time as well."

James nodded and then took a deep breath, "If he was tortured, then I'll need a copy of your diagnostic scan. I have no reports of a missing person with his description, but the spell the children used could have summoned him from anywhere. There's no guarantee that he's even British."

Poppy looked at the two men. "I didn't hear who he was or how he arrived at your house, James."

He ran a hand through his hair and shook his head in disbelief. "The kids cast a summoning spell. Albus and Lily have examined it briefly, and it could have pulled him from anywhere. Merlin only knows if he's going to press charges. The kids didn't even think about that."

"Why would they do something that dangerous," she gasped. Her healing instincts kicked in and she added, "I should examine all of them and make sure they haven't damaged their magical cores or suffered any other harm."

"I'll have them all come in for an exam," the raven-haired Auror agreed. "As to why, they thought they could summon a hero to defeat Slytherin and the Blood Purists. Neville Longbottom seems to be breaking under the weight of everyone's expectations of him and believes that he's nothing special. They thought if they could summon someone capable of defeating the Dark Lord, Neville would be safe."

Poppy shook her head at the children's recklessness. "Well, if it's any consolation, if he hadn't been summoned, he would likely have died. I don't think he could have lived another twenty or thirty minutes without medical treatment. Perhaps that will keep him from pressing any charges against the kids when he wakes up."

"We can only hope," muttered James. "However, I'll need to interrogate him about wherever he was being held and whoever tortured him. If they were Blood Purists, perhaps we'll have something tangible on some of them and can get a conviction. If it didn't occur in Britain, then we'll pass on the information to his local law enforcement."

The subdued teens waited as their parents and Madame Pomfrey discussed the results of their scans. She had already said they only showed normal magical depletion, nothing dangerous, so they weren't sure what the additional discussion was.

"I'm sorry guys," Neville said solemnly. "This whole fiasco is my fault." He looked over towards the bed that was guarded by privacy screens and wondered how the man was doing.

Hermione Granger shook her head at Neville's assertion, "No Neville, if anyone is to blame it's me. I'm the one that found the spell to 'summon a champion'." She followed Neville's gaze and wondered yet again who or what could possibly have done so much damage to the man they had summoned. "I should have planned better, more thoroughly," she stated. "I'm supposed to be the smart one, and I didn't think it through."

Holly Potter chuckled lightly, earning disapproving looks from the other teens. She pushed her auburn hair away from her face and smiled at them. "Come on, guys. We all agreed to perform the spell. We all thought it made perfect sense. We all also knew our parents wouldn't agree to it, which is why we did it when they were all involved elsewhere."

"Which we've heard about in excruciating detail," added her twin brother. He looked at Ron Weasley and raised an inquiring eyebrow as to his parents' response.

"Mum used her howler voice while I was in the room with her," the redhead reluctantly admitted, his freckles standing out against his

reddening cheeks. "I'm on restriction for the rest of the holiday and she's going to have a list of summer chores waiting at year's end. Dad just told me how disappointed he was in me."

Sebastian and Holly met each other's eyes and then the dark-haired teen confessed, "Dad is having us each write a paper on everything that could have gone wrong, including any laws we might have broken, and the consequences to us and to the family. We're not allowed to collaborate, so can't discuss the research with one another either until we're done."

"I had to explain the Headmaster's letter to my parents. They didn't really understand anything more than we summoned someone without his permission. When I explained what had happened, they were really disappointed in me." Hermione's face was pinched with anxiety at disappointing her parents.

"My parents were more appalled that we did a blood ritual without understanding the impact of using blood," confided Neville with some embarrassment. "Although they also felt badly that they didn't realize how much pressure I felt by all of the expectations put on me by the Daily Oracle."

"How do you suppose he is," asked Sebastian nodding towards the screened bed. "Is he going to live?"

Holly turned her gaze towards the hidden bed. "He looked so bad," she whispered. "His body was so...twisted and distorted."

"We need to talk to him," Ron stated grimly. "We have to let him know what we did and why. There has to be a reason the spell selected him. He probably knows how to defeat Slytherin."

A hand movement from Sebastian alerted him that the adults were returning, so they turned to face their parents.

"We've been talking about what you children did," said Arthur Weasley. "We believe that Mr. and Mrs. Potter's idea of writing a paper describing what could have gone wrong and what other options you had is one that you could benefit from, Ron. I will be expecting a similar paper from you before the end of the holidays."

"You will also be completing that exercise, Neville," said Frank Longbottom to his son. He looked at Hermione and added, "I believe you could benefit from it as well, Miss Granger. In fact, reading your essay will probably help your parents understand the ramifications of your actions."

Hermione's brown eyes widened as she looked at him in horror, but she was met with an implacable scrutiny. "Yes sir," the brunette said meekly. Oh, this was going to be bad. She had been able to keep the worst of the hazards she had faced over her years at Hogwarts away from her parents. She never lied to them, but she had omitted all of the details on occasion. This essay would likely open up a wide range of topics they would want to revisit. She gulped audibly at the thought of those conversations.

Chapter 3 – Am I Dead Then?

Ten days passed with their guest in a healing coma as Madame Pomfrey banished and re-grew one or more of his major bones each day and repaired the worst of the damage to his organs. To both Matron's and the Headmaster's surprise, the patient was frequently joined by the Headmaster's phoenix, who perched on the edge of the bed and sang uplifting songs to the unconscious young man. Madame Pomfrey also consulted with two specialists at St. Mungo's. The first was about treatment for prolonged Cruciatus exposure, and Severus Snape agreed to brew nerve regeneration potions tailored for the patient's age and body mass. The second was a vision specialist, and he would fit the young man with custom therapeutic lenses to be placed on the cornea to correct his vision.

"Why do you want permanent updating cornea lenses," the specialist asked Poppy. "Glasses would work just fine and would be less expensive."

Her normally stern face relaxed briefly showing great compassion. "I'll pay for the lenses myself if need be. You saw his prescription; he's practically blind without corrective lenses and his glasses were probably taken from him. He was tortured repeatedly without being able to even see what was coming. I don't want him to ever live in fear because he can't see."

The specialist swallowed hard and nodded. "I'll be back once he's awake and aware to fit him for the lenses."

The wards she had on the patient alerted her that he started to regain consciousness, so she notified Albus that he should wake up shortly. The Potions Master joined the Headmaster in the Infirmary as the young man's breathing changed and he began to move slightly in the bed. They gathered around the foot of the bed, so as not to intimidate their guest by hovering over him.

Harry felt like he was fighting his way through layers of sleep, trying to wake up. He heard the unmistakable trill of phoenix song and smiled at hearing the glorious soul-healing sound again. He slowly opened his eyes, and then blinked as they filled with water from the harsh light. He heard a muttered spell and the lights dimmed to

acceptable levels. He blinked the tears away and looked out, trying to focus on the images around him.

The distinctive long silver beard of a figure at the foot of his bed was accompanied by a black-clad figure. He recognized the blurry shapes of Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape and his voice cracked with disuse, "Oh, am I dead then? Funny, I thought the pain would stop when I died." He tried to push himself to a sitting position in the bed, but pain and fatigue overwhelmed him, and he slowly sank back into unconsciousness.

Poppy cast a quick diagnostic spell and nodded briefly. "He will likely fade in and out of consciousness for another day or two, but he's healing quite well, Headmaster."

Albus looked at the perplexing visitor as if he was an enigma to be solved. The Potions Master saw multiple expressions race across the older wizard's face and groaned quietly as he pinched the bridge of his nose. He knew how the Headmaster couldn't resist a mystery.

The nearly inaudible groan reached the Headmaster's ears and he couldn't help but chuckle as he read the other man's expression. "Severus my dear boy, would you please get a copy of Miss Granger's research and the spell used? I think we could benefit from more thorough investigation into it, and you are one of the best researchers we have."

Severus sighed softly and nodded curtly. It was easier to acquiesce when the old man was in the throes of a challenge, as he would get his way regardless of how much Severus struggled against him.

The members of the Order of the Phoenix gathered in a private parlor of the Leaky Cauldron, warded by Dumbledore himself against anyone seeing into the room or overhearing anything. Albus waited until everyone found a seat and made sure tea and biscuits were passed around. He cleared his throat and the members turned attentively to him.

"As many of you know, a young man was summoned by some of our students in a well-meaning attempt to find a champion to oppose Lord Slytherin. Several of us have examined the spell that was used, but we are still not certain from where the young man was summoned."

James Potter, felt obligated as a Senior Auror to point out that the young man was essentially kidnapped by the children and could potentially press charges for the abduction. "We will have to wait for him to wake up coherent enough for an in-depth discussion before we know whether that's going to be a possibility or not."

Sturgis Podmore, a square-jawed wizard with blonde hair who hadn't been there when the boy appeared asked, "Is it true that he had been near death from torture when he appeared?"

"Yes, he had been continually tortured for nearly a month from what Poppy could tell. He would have died without intervention."

"Well, doesn't that mean he was actually saved rather than kidnapped?" Podmore asked with some asperity.

James had to shake his head. "Unfortunately, that wasn't the children's intent in the ritual; it was merely a fortunate side-effect. We also don't know whether the summoning could have aggravated his physical condition. Until we know who he is, we also don't know whether his family will seek legal actions or reparations."

Albus waited for the conversation to quiet and then added, "There is something else to consider. Severus, would you let us know the results of your research?"

The Potions Master nodded curtly at the elderly wizard and raked his coal-colored eyes around the Order members. "The Headmaster asked me to research the spell in greater detail. At the first review of the spell, it would appear to summon someone who meets the casters criteria from anywhere in the world, however after further investigation, there are other possibilities." Confusion appeared on the faces of those listening as the taciturn man continued, "He could have been summoned from anywhere in this world, but it's possible that the spell could cross time and space."

"What does that mean, Severus? It doesn't even make sense," said Molly Weasley in bewilderment.

Albus spoke up at that point. "There is a theory that whenever a major event occurs, there are a number of possibilities about what could happen, and that every possibility actually creates its own

parallel reality. The young man could have been summoned from a parallel world." He couldn't help but chuckle as voices erupted around him.

"What?"

"That's insane!"

"Is that even possible?"

Alastor Moody shot a series of sparks from his wand and gained the group's attention. "Albus, are you saying that it's possible that this young man could be from a world that has already defeated Slytherin? If so, that could be a strategic advantage we can't ignore."

"It's possible," responded the Headmaster. "However, because the possibilities are nearly infinite, his world may not even have had Blood Purists."

"Further speculation is meaningless until the young man wakes up," added Snape.

"It's hard to ignore the fact that the man's presence could potentially be beneficial," responded Alice Longbottom, "but I agree with Severus. We simply have to wait for the poor man to wake up." She tried to ignore the flicker of hope that perhaps he might hold the answers they so desperately needed.

They spent the next hour discussing the political maneuverings of the Blood Purists, trying to determine how they could circumvent the passage of the worst of the laws the Purists were advocating. "Unfortunately, they are very clever," admitted Dumbledore. "For example, the new proposal to require registration and licensing of even family legacy wands is worded in such an ambiguous way that anything magical could eventually fall under the law. If we can't amend the wording, we are opening the entire British wizarding world up to potentially catastrophic consequences."

"Director Bones believes that the increase in vandalism and violence directed towards muggleborn businesses is a direct result of the Blood Purist philosophies and may even be led by that cartel," added James Potter. "However, all actions have been physical with

no magical signatures found at any site; they believe all actions have been purely physical in nature."

At the end of the night, James and Lily shared another cup of tea with their friend, the DADA instructor. Lily frowned suspiciously as the dark-haired man surreptitiously passed his hand over his and James' cups.

James took a sip and smirked at the other man at the taste of fire whiskey added to the tea. "Thanks Padfoot," he grinned.

Sirius grinned at his best friend and turned to his wife. "So tell me Lily, did the big guy faint when he realized what the kids had done?"

James responded indignantly before his wife could say anything, "Hey now, real men don't faint!" He paused and then added casually, "They stoically black out and crush their enemies beneath them as they fall."

Lily rolled her eyes as the two friends exchanged barbs and let them finish their "tea" before reminding James they needed to get home and review the chores assigned to the twins before sending them to bed. As part of their punishment, James and Lily had assigned ten o'clock bedtimes as well as a list of chores to be done each day in addition to their homework and punishment essay.

When Harry woke up again, his body ached all over. He lay quietly as his memories returned. He had survived the torture long enough to kill Voldemort and then had felt his mind being flooded with knowledge from the other man. He pushed those memories to one side; he wasn't prepared to deal with that just now. He hesitantly extended his magic out into the room, relieved to feel it respond easily for the first time since he had been captured by Death Eaters and put in the cell that suppressed his magic. The room felt familiar, but not threatening. With a great effort, he forced his eyes open.

Although everything was blurred, he recognized the Hogwarts Infirmary. However, it was wrong; all wrong. It was not only in pristine condition, but empty. Before he had been captured, Hogwarts had become a sanctuary for those whose homes had been destroyed or who were being targeted by the Death Eaters, especially the muggle-born and half-blood families. There was never a time that the beds were empty.

"I must have snapped in captivity," he thought. "I've retreated to a safer time in my mind. I wonder if I'm still in the cell, or whether I'm in the long-term ward at St. Mungo's."

He was so involved in these thoughts that he failed to notice several blurred shapes approaching him until he heard, "Good evening, young man."

Without any conscious thought but conditioned by a month of torture, Harry threw himself away from the blurred figures towering over him and onto the floor, ignoring the pain exploding through his body as he looked for a weapon to use. He cursed again the confiscation of his wand.

"Albus, James, step back," he heard a voice demand that sounded remarkably like Poppy Pomfrey's, but she had been killed while tending to the injured in a raid on Hogsmeade months ago. He heard a shuffle and saw two of the figures had moved away, while the white-clad figure raised what appeared to be empty hands.

"Young man, I spent many hours putting you back together again and have been tending to your needs for the last eleven days. I will be most displeased if you cause additional injuries to your still healing body."

It certainly sounded like Poppy Pomfrey, but then if he was insane, that would make sense. He always knew he could trust Poppy to put him back together again, no matter what.

"I'm going to levitate you back onto the bed and then run another diagnostic scan, and you are going to behave, is that clear?" He couldn't help but snicker at the familiar manner. Well, if he was hallucinating, he may as well enjoy her tender ministrations again.

Pomfrey took the snicker as assent and Harry was gently lifted from the floor back to the bed and he felt a scan tingle through his body. Her disapproving voice muttered disapprovingly, "You dislocated your shoulder with that maneuver. Stay still while I mend it." With a quick incantation, he felt the area numb and then with a loud crack, the shoulder was put back in place.

"Now," the mediwitch said with a slight smile of satisfaction now that her patient was quiet and in bed, "my name is Poppy Pomfrey, and I'm the Matron at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. What is your name?"

Harry looked at her with eyes widened surprise. His hallucination didn't recognize him? That made no sense. He flicked his eyes towards the other two blurred figures. He thought one had a long white beard and wore a purple robe trimmed with green and raised an eyebrow. The only person he knew who bore such a long beard was Albus Dumbledore, who had been killed during his search for horcruxes. Voldemort had been delighted to share that memory with him.

And yet an incredibly familiar voice tugged at his memory as the man said, "I think our visitor is still a bit overwhelmed, Poppy. May I come closer, young man?"

At Harry's cautious nod, he stepped to the foot of the bed along with another man with dark hair wearing an Auror's uniform. "My name is Albus Dumbledore and I'm the Headmaster of Hogwarts. This gentleman is Senior Auror James Potter. Are you feeling well enough to answer a few questions?"

At the name of the other man, Harry's eyes flashed to the dark-haired figure. He narrowed his eyes, trying to see more clearly, but could only make out dark hair and a tall lean form under the Auror robes. He saw blackness at the edge of his vision that rushed inwards, and he lost consciousness.

Harry awoke again to whispering near him. He tried to keep his breathing even, confused because the Death Eaters never bothered to whisper.

"He looks a lot better," save a voice that sounded like a young Neville Longbottom. "He almost seems a bit familiar, but I can't quite place how."

A female voice he didn't immediately recognize responded, "Mum said that the healing coma allowed them to re-grow most of his bones." There was a slight pause and then the voice continued, "I can't even imagine what he had to have gone through. We

overheard Mum and Dad talking, and Dad said that practically every bone in his body had been broken at least once."

"We need to talk with him before we're found. Do you suppose we could try an Ennervate?" Harry's eyes snapped open at the sound of Ron Weasley's voice. Five figures were gathered around him, a little too close for his comfort. He narrowed his eyes, trying to squint the figures into focus. Damn Voldemort for deliberately crushing his glasses! He passed his eyes over a boy and a girl he didn't recognize, but paused at seeing Neville Longbottom. He appeared younger, a little more slender and stood straighter than he remembered Neville standing. A bushy-haired brunette stood next to him, giving him a clear scrutiny holding a hand over her mouth in shock, and he hoped it would serve to keep her from exploding questions at him. A tall red-head stood next to her. Merlin, it was Ron, only a younger version, without the familiarity of death filling his eyes and weighing on his shoulders. He frowned as he realized that all of the teens appeared to be three to four years younger than he remembered.

"Ron," he tried to say, but his voice cracked with disuse and the dryness in his throat. The girl he didn't know quickly placed a privacy spell around the bed, while Hermione conjured a glass of water for him. His hands shook, a result of the many Cruciatus gifts they had given him, slopping the water over the edge, and he allowed her to help guide the glass to his mouth. He gratefully swallowed the cool water and sighed at how it soothed his parched throat.

"What happened," he began again. And then the memory returned of trying to help Ron up after his legs had been crushed, and Ron saying in a low passionate voice, "Go, Harry! You're our best and only hope. You're the one the Prophecy means and only you can stop Voldemort." He clenched his wand and said through gritted teeth, "Go! I'll delay them as long as possible." When Harry shook his head in horror and tried to levitate the broken teen, Ron said, "Damn it, Harry. Make my life and death mean something! And tell Hermione that...that I loved her, OK? Now go! I'll buy you every second I can."

Only Ron's demand to make his life and death mean something allowed Harry to hug his best friend tightly before he took off in the shadows, trying to get away from the anti-apparition wards. He

never saw Ron again and here his double was staring at him with wide blue eyes.

The teens watched as the young man's face closed off, not certain what had just happened. "We wanted to explain what we did and why," Neville said nervously. "Before the adults talked to you."

Harry wondered whether he was hallucinating or whether this was part of an elaborate Death Eater trick to make him think he had been rescued and then crush his spirit by showing it all to be an illusion.

"It's because of Slytherin," began Ron and Harry almost snickered at the redhead's familiar sneer of disgust as he said the word. "He's gone from only political moves to sneak attacks on muggleborns and even half-bloods. Not that it can be pinned on him and the Blood Purists, of course. They're too clever for that."

Harry frowned and looked at Hermione to interpret Ron's rambling explanation. The brunette immediately responded, "That is Ron Weasley, the boy next to him is Neville Longbottom, beside him are Sebastian and Holly Potter, and I'm Hermione Granger. We're students at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in Scotland." Harry's eyes flickered over each of the people as they were named, and paused at the brother and sister. Potter? He didn't remember anyone else named Potter at Hogwarts.

He turned his attention back to Hermione as she continued, "Lord Slytherin is the last descendent of Salazar Slytherin, one of the founders of Hogwarts and is a very dark wizard. He's a Blood Purist; he believes in the supremacy of purebloods and has been getting laws passed that limit what muggleborns as well as other species can do. It was all political at first, but in the last five years, violence began to erupt, but not in a way that can be traced back to Lord Slytherin and his followers."

"We needed a champion," interrupted Ron leaning closer to the bed. "We needed someone capable of defeating Slytherin, so we," he swept an arm at the teens around the bed, "performed a ritual that summoned you."

Harry narrowed his eyes at the illusion of his best friend, even as Hermione smacked the redhead on the arm in an all too familiar gesture. "The wizarding world seems to believe that Neville here is

some type of Chosen One because he survived an impossible situation as a baby." Harry flicked his eyes to Neville's unmarked forehead and frowned, while Hermione kept talking. "They seem to expect him to right all of the world's wrongs. I was researching spells to summon a familiar to help him when I came across the ritual we used. It was only supposed to summon someone capable of defeating Slytherin and someone who was willing to leave their current situation." Her eyes seemed to be begging him to understand, and he raised a hand to rub his forehead, only to pause as his mind realized the hand was fully healed, although shaking slightly with the post-Cruciatius tremors.

"Well I obviously wanted out of my previous situation," he said gruffly. "I had been a prisoner for quite some time." He looked around at the teens, now convinced this was a hallucination that he had concocted in his mind. It made sense that his mind would have his old friends summon him home. He just didn't understand why it made another villain for him to fight. Maybe it was his 'saving people thing'? Yeah, that sounded like something his tortured mind would fabricate. Nevertheless, on the off chance that these were Death Eaters in disguise, he added, "However, I'm no one's hero. When can you send me back?"

The Neville lookalike slumped as if in defeat, but Ron's doppelganger puffed up in anger and frustration. "You're supposed to be a champion, a warrior, a savior," he snarled. "Someone bold and fearless who would help save us from Slytherin and his Blood Purists! But you're nothing but a coward. I'll bet you would be a Slytherin yourself!"

Harry stopped squinting in an effort to see and instead narrowed his eyes in anger. This figment Ron was acting as if Harry hadn't already given everything to the war effort. This belligerent hot-headed teen hadn't faced death countless times, his eyes weren't haunted with the effects of war. This prat obviously wasn't his best friend.

Unconsciously he used knowledge he gained from Voldemort and allowed his magic to pool and then cast a silent and wandless Legilimens on the ranting teen, but instead of searching the redhead's memories, he shared one of his own.

The redhead stopped talking mid-word, as his face paled dramatically and his eyes widened in horror. He began to sway and would have fallen to the ground if the other teenagers hadn't caught him. With another silent spell, he canceled the privacy spell that was muting their conversation just as Hermione yelled out Ron's name.

James Potter and Albus Dumbledore entered the Infirmary, hoping to have a coherent interview with their guest when they heard a yell from behind the privacy partitions. James had his wand in his hand and was moving rapidly towards the screened area, his senses at heightened alert before he even thought about it. He swept his wand and one of the curtained panels moved aside, showing his children as well as the other three that had summoned the young man. No one was supposed to be visiting the guest, but he should have known the teens would have found a way. Ron Weasley was on the floor, shuddering under the concerned hands of Hermione and Neville Longbottom.

"What happened to Mr. Weasley," asked Albus Dumbledore calmly coming up behind the Auror and gently pushing his wand hand down. Madame Pomfrey came up behind the men and began to examine the collapsed teen.

"Mr. Weasley there was berating me for not meeting his expectations of a warrior champion, so I decided to share one day of my imprisonment with him," answered the dark-haired young man in the bed, his voice hoarse from disuse. "He won't feel what I felt; he'll only observe it as a bystander, as if he's in a pensieve memory. It will be interesting to see whether he still considers me a coward once he absorbs the memories."

He looked at the Hermione lookalike and asked again, "I repeat, when can you send me back?" He noticed Madame Pomfrey levitate the Ron twin towards another bed, but kept his eyes on the girl.

The brunette stared at Ron Weasley with another long look before returning her gaze to the young man in the bed. She shook her head slowly as she admitted with some embarrassment, "The book only had the summoning spell. It didn't have a reversal."

Harry frowned and said slowly, "I see. Tell me Miss Granger, where did you think I was going to reside? On what was I supposed to live? How am I supposed to survive with no clothes, no wand, no home,

and no galleons?" The girl was blushing bright red now, her eyes firmly on the floor. "Are you saying that you didn't consider any of this before you all agreed to abduct me?"

"I...I..." Hermione shook her head, stuttering in her attempts to answer him. Albus stepped forward and said soothingly, "I can understand your concern Mr..." He paused to wait for Harry's name, but the young man just shook his head.

"You know what? I am either hallucinating or in the long-term ward of St. Mungo's, and I'm not going to hold a conversation with my hallucinations any longer."

Albus looked at the bed-ridden figure uncertainly and then asked, "Why do you believe that you're hallucinating?"

Harry snorted and said shortly, "Perhaps because dead people keep trying to talk to me."

Albus and James stared at the figure in the bed and then glanced at one another again with some perplexity. James took a half-step away to let Albus continue the conversation. The elderly wizard asked gently, "Have you ever heard the theory of parallel worlds?" The fake Hermione gave a small gasp at the question.

Harry rolled his eyes at the older wizard. "What, like alternate dimensions?" He did remember his Hermione mentioning it at one time. "A friend read a theory about it that she shared with me, but I wasn't paying that much attention."

"When the children summoned you, it's possible they called you from a parallel world, not from our own world. If that's true, then perhaps the Albus Dumbledore of your world is dead."

"It's more likely that I'm either insane or this is a Death Eater trick."

The others look at one another in confusion and back to Harry. "What is a Death Eater?"

Harry closed his eyes at the question. Did they really believe he was that stupid?

"Even if this is all a hallucination, surely you could at least share your name with us," James Potter said encouragingly. Harry looked at the figure that resembled an older version of the man he had seen in the Mirror of Erised and later in the photo album Hagrid had given him. As a test, he decided not to say Harry Potter. In fact, since Sirius made him his heir, he had the legal right to the name Harry James Potter-Black. He decided to use just a part of that name and watch their reactions.

"I'm Harrison Black," he finally said.

"A pleasure to meet you, Mr. Black," said the Headmaster. His blue eyes seemed to crinkle with humor as he asked, "By any chance are you related to Sirius Black?" The young man didn't notice that the James Potter doppelganger seemed to examine his features carefully.

Harry's chest tightened with familiar grief at the mention of his lost godfather. "Black is a common name in the Muggle world," he prevaricated. "Who is Sirius Black?"

"He's the Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Black and our Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher," replied Dumbledore. His sharp eyes noticed the tightening of the young man's jaw at the mention of Sirius Black.

"I think I would like to rest now," said Harry wearily; the wandless magic had exhausted him and this conversation was too disconcerting to continue. "I'm still not convinced that this isn't a hallucination and it's a bit overwhelming." He closed his eyes and ignored everyone until they finally left the Infirmary.

Sebastian slid into a seat beside Neville while Holly sat next to Hermione across the table in the Great Hall for dinner. They had been permitted to stay at Hogwarts until Ron had recovered, although the Headmaster had expressed his disappointment in all of them for sneaking into Hogwarts as well as disturbing the recovering Mr. Black without permission. "Has anyone seen Ron since he collapsed," asked Neville with some concern. After their visitor had shared memories with Ron, the redhead had collapsed on the floor of the Infirmary and Madame Pomfrey had levitated him to a bed before shoos the rest of them out of the room.

Just as the others were beginning to shake their heads negatively, Hermione beamed a smile towards the Great Hall doors, "There he is!"

The lanky redhead made his way quickly to his friends and slid into the seat next to Neville who immediately asked, "All right then, mate?"

Ron couldn't help the slight reddening of his cheeks. "Yeah, sorry for worrying everyone."

The plates appeared on the table and they began filling their plates. To everyone's surprise, Ron moved rather slowly in adding food to his plate, and rather than digging in, he just pushed the mashed potatoes around on his plate.

Hermione was the first to ask hesitantly, "What happened, Ron?"

The teen looked up at her and then back down at his plate in embarrassment. "He showed me what really happened to him." He raised his eyes again and met the eyes of each of his friends. "I should never have called him a coward. What little I saw was horrible."

"But what happened," asked Hermione again with some terseness, "what did you see?" Not knowing something was a constant irritation to the bushy-haired girl.

Ron pushed the food around on his plate some more and finally took a bite with seeming reluctance before answering. "He was in some type of cell, chained to the wall. Four people came in...well, only three were people. One wasn't human, at least not totally. He had no hair, grayish-white skin, only slits where his nose should have been and blood-red eyes. I couldn't hear what was being said; I could only watch. It seemed like the non-human was mocking the guy. And...our guy..."

"Harrison Black," interjected Neville.

"That's his name? Well, he was surrounded by these others, chained to a wall, and he refused to be intimidated. It was obvious that he was taunting them back and then the gray guy gave a command and they began to cast the...." He looked around and

lowered his voice, "I swear they were casting the Cruciatus on him. It's no wonder it's an Unforgiveable. They cast it over and over and laughed as his body twisted and contorted in pain." He pushed his plate away. "Merlin, it was awful. I've never seen anything like it!"

They were all silent for a few moments. "Did you recognize any of them, Ron," asked Holly.

"Well, one looked like a Malfoy; same white blond hair and stuck-up attitude. He was the one that cast the Cruciatus the most, although there was a woman who really seemed to enjoy casting it or maybe she just enjoyed hurting him. I didn't recognize the others." He shook his head and rubbed his face wearily. "I should never have said the things I did, demanding that he be our champion. I saw only one experience, but it had to have been early in his imprisonment, because his clothes weren't all torn and bloody like they were when he...arrived here." He frowned slightly and then added, "He didn't have the claw marks down his face either. That had to have happened while he was there."

"I'll bet Dad will want to see the memory in a pensieve," said Sebastian thoughtfully. "If the Blood Purists or another group are taking people hostage and torturing them, there will have to be an investigation."

"Another group," gasped Holly. "Merlin forbid we have another group of crazy people out there!"

"I don't know who these were," responded Ron, "but Dumbledore came to see me in the Infirmary and took a copy of the memory. I'm sure he'll share it with your Dad, Sebastian." As they left the Great Hall, the quintet continued to discuss whether the mysterious visitor had the knowledge to help them defeat Slytherin and whether he could be persuaded to do so. They failed to realize that a figure was following them, keeping well within the shadows.

The hooded man knocked quietly on the door to the Dark Lord's study. When he received permission to enter, he stood just inside the room and waited with respectful deference until he was motioned forward. He walked to within two meters of where the other man was seated behind a large and imposing desk and then dropped down to one knee and bowed his head.

The rich and silky tone of his Master was kind as he said, "Welcome, my faithful servant. What news brings you to me today?"

The man stood and dropped his hood, revealing dark brown hair and a round innocuous face. "My Lord, I was at Hogwarts and noticed five students at dinner that were not on the list of those remaining at the school for the holidays. They were involved in a serious discussion, so I followed them when they left the Great Hall to listen to their conversation."

An elegant eyebrow moved above the dark eyes watching the standing man intently. "And you thought I would be interested in the conversation of children?"

"My Lord, it was because of who they were. The Longbottom heir, the Potter twins, the youngest Weasley and their mudblood female friend." He waited for a nod of consent before proceeding and then continued, "They were discussing a ritual they had performed and it appeared the purpose was to 'summon a champion' to defeat you, my Lord."

The seated man's voice was both amused and intrigued. "Indeed? What else did you learn?"

"Apparently the ritual worked and a man appeared. However, from what I could ascertain, he was not entirely sympathetic to their goal and in fact did something that caused the young Weasley to spend several hours in the Infirmary. They were wondering what they could do to persuade him to help." He bowed his head again to indicate the end of his report.

Lord Slytherin drummed his fingers on the arm of his chair as he considered the information. "You did well to bring this to me. I want you to find out exactly who their ritual summoned; from where did he come; whether he is Light, Dark or Neutral; his blood status as well as his strengths and weaknesses. Perhaps if he is not willing to help them, he may be sympathetic to our cause."

"Yes, my Lord. It shall be done." The man bowed deeply and left quickly to fulfill his Lord's bidding.

"Interesting, very interesting. And just what did you know about this Albus," Lord Slytherin muttered to himself. "Or are the students

performing rituals right under your very intrusive nose these days?" He smirked and turned back to the stack of paperwork in front of him.

While Lord Slytherin was working in his office, Albus Dumbledore was in his own office. He pulled back from a large pensieve on his desk with a slightly sickened expression on his face for what he had witnessed. He considered the comments he thought he had deciphered. As a teacher for many decades, it had become almost a necessity to learn how to read the lips of his more creative students. Any forewarning about upcoming pranks was helpful to limit the damage. While the inhuman figure in the pensieve had an odd mouth that made it more difficult to interpret, he didn't believe the name he had called the young prisoner was Black. Harry, yes. But not Black.

Harry woke up screaming, his body drenched in sweat as he fought his way clear of the sheets. Madame Pomfrey came hurrying out of her quarters, connected to her office. This was the fourth consecutive night that he had woken up with horrifying nightmares.

His eyes cleared more rapidly as he recognized that he was not in his cell being tortured. Fortunately, the Matron had called in a vision specialist who prescribed lenses that could be worn indefinitely, allowing him clear sight even upon waking. Poppy cast a freshening charm on the young man to clean the sweat off, and then with a flick of her wand, changed his pajamas and sheets. He simply sighed heavily and nodded in gratitude. He closed his eyes wearily and she made a mental note to speak with him in the morning.

When she returned after breakfast, she noticed that the young man didn't appear to have slept again and his breakfast tray was mostly untouched. Well, she could understand that, but it made her even more grateful for the visitor that had floo'd into her office that morning. She looked up to see Severus Snape arrive with a rack of potion vials and smiled in relief. It had taken many days to brew the specialized nerve potions, but now they could begin to heal the nerve damage. The Potions Master explained the dosage and then left after a quick scrutiny of their guest.

"Mr. Black, I called in an expert on nerve damage from St. Mungo's for the prolonged effects of the Cruciatus. He recommended a special potion regimen to regenerate the nerves designed

specifically for your body and age. She handed him a thick yellow potion with swirling grey flecks. He sniffed it cautiously and raised an eyebrow. "It doesn't smell as vile as I expected," he said in response to her questioning look.

She seemed to restrain an answering smile, but said briskly, "Drink up, Mr. Black."

He held his breath and drank it down quickly. "Hm, it tastes like old coffee and warm spit. I guess that's better than earwax and dirty socks," he commented.

That did earn him a chuckle, quickly disguised as a cleared throat. "Now Mr. Black, just as it made sense to consult with a nerve specialist for that damage, I also asked another colleague to come speak with you this morning." She turned towards the door to her office and called, "Preston!"

A middle-aged gentleman walked into the room from her office in response to her call. Everything about the man encouraged the observer to trust him. His wide chestnut colored eyes seemed empathetic and honest. His thick wavy brown hair reached his shoulders and appeared slightly tousled but dignified. He was just under medium height with a lithe build, clad in soothing shades of charcoal grey, silver and cream.

"Good morning, Mr. Black. My name is Preston MacMillian. I am a Healer associated with St. Mungo's. You are welcome to call me by my title or my first name, whichever you find the most comfortable. May I join you for a while?"

At Harry's negligent wave at the chair, the Healer drew the curtains around the bed and then cast a series of privacy charms. He sat down and gave the young man a half smile of thanks.

"Madame Pomfrey asked me to see you. I typically work with Aurors and rescue workers who have been involved in traumatic situations. Whenever the human mind is exposed to an extreme circumstance, there are normal reactions that most people experience. Nightmares are very common as the sleeping mind replays what happened or twists the memory into something even more frightening. A lingering sense of fear or sadness is also quite common, as is a general

feeling of helplessness. It's natural, normal and expected to feel that way."

He settled himself comfortably and gave the youth a wry smile. "If you think I'll come to see you and expect you to immediately spill your guts and share your innermost secrets, you'll be disappointed. I will only ask you to discuss whatever you're comfortable sharing. If it's about how you arrived here, we can talk about that. If it's about your physical recovery, we can talk about that. If you want to rant about the poor quality of professional Quidditch matches, I'm open to that as well."

Harry's lips twitched on their own at the other man's approach. "I appreciate Madame Pomfrey calling you, but to be honest, I'm not sure that you're not part of some massive hallucination that I'm producing. In fact, isn't it more likely that I'm a patient in the long-term ward at St. Mungo's than I've been summoned across worlds by a group of Fifth Year students?"

"More likely? That's a good question. What do you think it would take for you to believe that this is a different world than the one you left? Wait, don't answer that." The Healer took out his wand and raised it upright and said, "I, Preston MacMillian, do solemnly swear on my magic to keep everything confidential that Harrison Black chooses to share with me and give my oath not to share anything without his knowledge and consent. So mote it be." A golden light swirled around the man before dissipating.

"There, anything you say to me will be held in absolute confidence. As a Mind Healer, I'm also an accomplished Occlumens, but the oath itself will prevent the knowledge from being taken from me, even with Veritaserum."

Harry had seen the magic confirm the oath and was somewhat surprised that it had been voluntarily offered. He looked at the man with some curiosity, wondering what his scheme was.

"So tell me, Mr. Black, what tests can we devise that will tell you whether you're in an alternate world or whether you're insane?"

"I don't know. If this is all a hallucination, my mind could make up anything."

Preston settled more comfortably in his chair. "Well actually, the mind can only do so much. For example, in the real world, you normally can't press your hand through a solid surface without assistance of some kind, such as a spell. In a dream or hallucination, you can probably put your hand through any surface. Can you press your hand through the table next to you?"

Harry reached out and pressed the palm of his hand against the table top. He felt the pressure against his palm, but his hand stayed on the top of the table.

"Try doing that multiple times throughout the day, using any surface. Eventually, you'll be able to try it when you sleep. That will be one way to realize that you're dreaming as well, and that any memories are only that."

Harry pressed his hand against his mattress, and while the padding pressed inward, his hand stayed on top. He looked at the other man and nodded. "Seems simple enough."

Preston gave him an encouraging smile. "Just keep doing that whenever you think of it, Mr. Black." He added, "Madame Pomfrey tells me that you've been able to walk to the bathroom and shower alone, and are ready for some more physical activity. The students will be returning in another few days from their Winter break. What do you think about exploring Hogwarts before they return?"

Harry blinked in surprise at the offer. That didn't seem like a Death Eater trick, but perhaps his imagination would suggest it. "I would like to visit the Library to see old newspapers and history books," he admitted.

"That's an excellent idea. While dreaming or hallucinating, you can occasionally see words on a page, but not an entire book, at least not in any coherent order. So reading old newspapers and history books will be both a good test of whether this is real, as well as finding out the differences between your world and this one."

Harry tilted his head and considered the Healer. "You seem to believe that I'm a visitor from another world."

"Based on what I've heard about you, that seems a plausible explanation. Firstly, the students used a summoning spell that

brought you to us. Secondly, your accent is British, but no one with your description from Britain has been reported missing in either the magical or muggle world." Harry blinked at that admission, which the Mind Healer caught. "Yes, the Aurors used contacts in the Muggle world to see if you were missing from there. Thirdly, you were severely tortured, but there is no known group in Britain that is known for that type of torture. Of course, you could have been summoned from another country, but fourthly, you've mentioned Death Eaters, a term that you seem to believe should be recognized, but is unknown to us. I understand that the Aurors contacted their counterparts in countries in the International Confederation of Wizards to ask about terrorist groups by that name, and no country has radical groups known by that description."

Harry lay back against his pillow and considered all that the man had told him. It seemed much too elaborate to be a hallucination, but the idea of an elaborate Death Eater hoax still seemed like a possibility. After all, they had force fed him potions that made him relive his worst experiences.

A flash of flame appeared in front of him and to his surprise Fawkes settled on his bed and trilled at both men. "Fawkes," Harry whispered, "Is that you?"

The phoenix crooned an uplifting melody and walked up to the young man's face and rubbed his head against his cheek.

"Is that the Headmaster's phoenix," asked Preston almost reverently. He had never seen a phoenix before and was awed by its incredible beauty.

"Yes, this is Fawkes. At least, he looks like Fawkes," he added hesitantly. The phoenix trill resembled laughter and the beautiful bird began to preen the dark hair gently. As the phoenix continued to sing and groom his hair, he began to question whether he was actually in another world where James Potter, Severus Snape, Sirius Black and Albus Dumbledore were still alive.

"I think I would like to visit the Library, Healer MacMillian" he said hesitantly. The older man smiled approvingly at him.

OoOoOoOo

Chapter 4 – Not in Kansas Any More

Madame Pomfrey transfigured two hospital gowns and a couple of buttons into attire that didn't leave Harry's backside exposed for his first excursion outside of the Infirmary. She offered him the choice of crutches or a cane for his first walk through Hogwarts, but insisted that he had to use one or the other to help relieve the stress on the newly re-grown bones. Harry grumbled at her, but grudgingly accepted the cane while muttering that at least it wasn't a "pimp cane". She shooed the two men out with the warning to be out no more than three hours, and to rest frequently.

"Haven't we already used up my hour's consultation, Healer MacMillian?" asked Harry as he limped out of the Infirmary.

"Actually, the idea of meeting someone from a parallel world was so intriguing that I cleared my calendar," Preston admitted with a self-deprecating smile. "However, whenever you're tired of my company, let me know. I would be interested in accompanying you, though."

Harry snorted in amusement at the Healer's honesty, "Yeah, OK." The younger man hobbled his way from the Infirmary on the third floor down a long corridor and to the stairs to the fourth floor while Preston accompanied him in companionable silence. He paused to catch his breath before tackling the stairs one step at a time until he reached the top, and then had to rest again. "Sure," he muttered, "just a quick trip to the Library." He panted briefly and started shuffling towards the Library doors, "No problem." Preston chuckled, but changed it into a cough at Harry's half-hearted glare.

They entered the Library and Harry felt both relief and irritation at seeing the thin and irritable features of Irma Pince. He limped to her desk, leaning heavily on his cane.

"Good afternoon, Madam Pince," he said politely.

"I don't believe I know you," the vulture-like woman said suspiciously. "You don't look like a student."

"My name is Harrison Black and this is Healer Preston MacMillian. We would like to see old newspapers from the last twenty years as well as any books on recent history, again for the last twenty years."

The surly woman looked at both of them with disapproval. "The older newspapers are kept in the room to the left. Be very careful not to rip, fold, smear or in any other manner damage those copies, or the consequences will be severe. Recent History books are in the thirteenth row, left side, third and fourth shelves."

Harry smiled charmingly at the older woman, "Thank you, Madame Pince. You are a jewel among women." He turned and limped to the indicated room where the two men found the newspapers carefully bound in large leather folders, labeled by year and month.

He hesitated over 1981, but moved back to January 1980 and selected that folder, holding it against his chest as he hobbled to the nearest table and chairs. He opened the folder and received his first surprise, "The Daily Oracle?" He looked up at Preston MacMillian with a raised eyebrow.

"Were you expecting another publication," asked the curious Healer.

"It was known as the Daily Prophet for as long as I've seen it," admitted Harry as he began scanning headlines. He stopped at "Lord Slytherin addresses the Wizengamot" where a picture of an attractive middle-aged man was standing and gesturing elegantly to the assemblage. He could see the resemblance to the teenaged shade of Tom Riddle that he had faced in the Chamber of Secrets. The article described Lord Slytherin's passionate appeal to the members of the Wizengamot in support of passage of a bill to limit representation of non-human species. "They certainly must be represented," stated the distinguished Lord, "But as witches and wizards make up the majority of the wizarding world, surely they should always maintain a majority vote?"

He turned the page to read a synopsis of Lord Slytherin's life. Apparently in the 1950's, the heir to Slytherin was identified as Tom Marvolo Riddle, who descended through the Gaunt line. He took on the title of Lord Slytherin in a grandiose ceremony before the entire Wizengamot. Known Family allies to the Slytherin line included the Averys, Lestranges, Malfoys, McNairs and Rosiers.

Harry paused in his reading, and then re-read the start of the article. If Riddle became Lord Slytherin in the 1950's and the biography made no mention of a war, did that mean there had been no war?

Entire family lines had died in his world. Were they alive here? He continued reading.

The article also pointed out the passage of some key legislation that limited employment opportunities for muggleborns and half-bloods if equally qualified purebloods were available for the positions. The article cross-referenced voting records, which Harry made a mental note to seek out.

He continued turning the pages and retrieved subsequent months to peruse. He noticed that the Lestranges and Rosiers submitted a proposal that attempted to limit educational opportunities for non-purebloods, but the effort failed as the Hogwarts charter was set up to permit anyone with magical ability to attend the school; in fact a fund was set up to pay tuition and supplies.

As Harry browsed the articles, he noticed a slow but subtle change in the wording of many articles. They went from impartial and factual, to using words that favored Slytherin and his Allies while subtly demeaning his opponents. Slytherin and his Allies were described as "distinguished" and "well-educated" while their opponents were "impulsive" and even "presumptuous". Apparently when Slytherin's cartel could not stop muggleborns from joining the magical society, they found gossip and slander to be an effective way to limit their opportunities. As he read through the obituaries, he realized he was seeing more muggleborns listed due to a variety of unusual accidents and unknown illnesses. He had to wonder if Riddle had begun using assassination against the muggleborns when legislation didn't stop them.

This was totally different from his history. Rather than publicly and very physically slaughtering the muggleborns and half-bloods, the Blood Purists had taken a more clandestine and subtle approach. He could see that they would win more followers this way.

Eventually, he reached October of 1981 and slowly turned the pages of the month that had led to his parents' murders.

Potter Heir and Family Friend Killed in Robbery Attempt

The first born son of James and Lily Potter as well as their friend Remus Lupin were killed in what appeared to be a robbery attempt on the Potter home in Godric's Hollow.

The young couple left their son Harry in the care of their long-time friend while they attended a business meeting at Gringotts. The couple apparated back to their home when Potter, a young Auror, felt the wards fall around their house. They arrived to find the wards breached and the door blown in as well as many curse marks on the walls, floors and ceilings. Lupin appeared to have fought ferociously in defense of his friend's young son, but was eventually killed by dozens of conjured silver darts. He was 21 years old. Fifteen month old Harry James Potter was found dead in his crib from an apparent Blasting Curse. A jewelry box in the master bedroom was missing; leading investigators to deduce the deaths were due to an interrupted robbery attempt.

Harry felt his throat tighten as he realized that Remus gave his life in both worlds to save him. He closed the large folder and placed it carefully back on the shelf. "I think that's enough for today," he said despondently to MacMillian.

"Do you think anyone would go to the effort of creating so many years of newspapers if this was an elaborate hoax," asked the Mind Healer.

Harry began limping to the exit and nodded politely to Madam Pince on the way out. Once in the hallway he looked up at the older man. "No," he said quietly. "Even Voldemort wouldn't go to such extremes to trick me."

The Mind Healer looked interested at the name and made a mental note to remember to ask the young man about it later when they had built a better relationship.

"Do you think someone who was hallucinating could create such detailed articles much less the advertising?"

Harry sighed heavily. "No, I think you win, Toto. I'm not in Kansas any longer."

The raven-haired teen lay in his bed in the Hogwarts Infirmary following his explanation of the Wizard of Oz and finally bidding Healer MacMillian goodbye. The older man promised to stop by again the next day, to which Harry merely nodded as he limped towards his bed. A fussy Madame Pomfrey checked him out and

gave him another potion to drink before insisting that he rest quietly for a while. Now he lay tiredly while his mind tried to absorb the fact that he was actually in another world; a world that was both familiar and strange to him. He remembered Dumbledore introducing "Senior Auror James Potter" and realized it wasn't a hallucination. James and Lily Potter were alive! And Sirius Black was the DADA teacher, which meant he hadn't fallen through the veil! That implied that he was likely in the castle somewhere. And if Voldemort, or Slytherin, hadn't been defeated, that meant he hadn't needed to be reborn and Cedric Diggory hadn't been "the spare" that died. Poppy was alive, the Headmaster and even the greasy git of a Potions Master. All the faces he never expected to see again! It was almost too much to contemplate.

He took a deep breath to stop his rampaging thoughts. The James and Lily Potter here weren't his parents, and their first-born son had died along with Remus Lupin. They had led totally different lives, but perhaps there would be a hint of what his parents might have been like. And they had twins after their Harry died. Odd that they were the same age as the counterparts of his friends though and even more odd that he was older than them. He couldn't begin to understand how the time shift had occurred.

So what was he supposed to do? Say, "Hi, my real name is Harry James Potter-Black and I was your son in my world"? Yeah, that would go over well. Besides, he had already introduced himself as Harrison Black, so perhaps he would keep with that persona and just observe these people for a while. But how to stay in touch with them? Once he was physically recovered, what excuse could he offer that would encourage Albus to invite him to stay here at Hogwarts? Alternately, should he find a place to live in Godric's Hollow and hope to run into the Potters that way?

"Think Harry," he muttered. Perhaps if they didn't have a method to send him back, he could request to sit in on some NEWT-level classes so that he could prepare to retake them in this world. That would be a valid reason to be in the school, and would give him exposure to Sirius, Dumbledore, and the others.

He realized that his emotions were causing his magic to fluctuate and hastily focused on his Occlumency training to bring himself under control. He decided to push the idea of relationships with the

Potters and Sirius aside for a while and sat quietly, focusing on his Occlumency shields.

He remembered the sudden influx of knowledge from Voldemort and hesitantly began to review the area he had cordoned off to contain that information. He realized it wasn't actually the Dark Lord's memories that he had inherited, for which he was grateful, but facts and data on a variety of esoteric subjects. In his mindscape, he had created a small library, where each "book" was a topic category where he stored information and memories. He began to create new books for the library on topics he had never studied, including runes, wards, Arithmancy, demonology, necromancy and quite a bit on the Dark Arts. Apparently Voldemort was hungry for knowledge on many topics.

He chuckled as he found a variety of spells cosmetic charms, "I wonder whether old Snake Face had been tired of his inhuman appearance" and snorted in amusement of the mental image of Voldemort in lipstick and blush. Eventually he realized the spells also fell under glamour and camouflage categories. He recognized he now knew an ancient Mesopotamian camouflage spell translated to Latin that prevented anyone who came in contact with the target from being able to focus on appearance or completely recall their distinguishing characteristics.

"You look just like your father, but with your mother's eyes," was something he had heard from the moment he stepped into the wizarding world. He had noticed how gaunt his face was after weeks of torture and starvation, but once he recovered more, he would likely gain a greater resemblance to James Potter, even if he was scarred from Fenris Greyback's attack. If he wanted to remain incognito, he would need to try a spell like that, but the brief casting he had done wandlessly with Ron Weasley had exhausted him.

"I need a wand," he muttered. "Maybe there would be something in the Room of Requirements if he asked it for things that had been lost. Or maybe...hmm."

Harry looked towards the office and realized that Madame Pomfrey wasn't around. He cleared his throat and then said quietly but clearly, "I would like to speak to a Hogwarts house elf, please." Almost immediately he heard a small pop and turning his head, he saw a

small figure wearing a crisp Hogwarts pillowcase. "You need something, young master? I is Nebby. How can Nebby help?"

"Thank you for coming so promptly, Nebby," Harry said with a smile. "I appreciate your helpfulness."

The little figure's already enormous eyes widened at his words. "Nebby is pleased to help such a kind and thoughtful young master! How may Nebby be of service?"

"Nebby, I was summoned here without anything to my name. No clothing, no galleons, and worst, no wand. I was thinking that in the hundreds of years the school has been in existence, perhaps some children lost their wands that I could perhaps use temporarily until I can buy my own? Do you know if there is anything like a 'lost and found' area in the school?"

The little elf nodded her head excitedly. "Yes, yes young master! There is the Come-and-Go room. Anything lost goes there."

Harry restrained a groan at having to go to the seventh floor. He was so tired already! But he managed a smile at the eager elf and asked, "Could you hand me that cane over there? I'll go see what the room has."

The house elf looked from the cane to the young man pushing himself up from the bed and shook her head so fast that her ears nearly hit her in her face. "No, no, no. You is hurt. You is not going to the room. Nebby is going and finding the wands and bringing them to the young master. You is staying here." She pointed a finger sternly at the bed and waited until he collapsed again and nodded at her in relief before popping away.

She returned in ten minutes with a large box which she presented to Harry with eagerness. "All of these is being lost more than ten years ago, so they is not being from an existing student. Young Master can see if any of these is matching his needs."

Harry lifted the wands from the box one by one, careful not to channel any magic through them, but only check for compatibility. Many of them he dropped immediately as they were uncomfortable with his magic. Of the first twenty or so wands, only one was barely suitable. He was beginning to despair when he ran his hand over the

wands still in the box and felt a slight tug. His fingers closed around the wand and he felt his magic adjust and attune to it. "Lumos" he muttered and it immediately lit up at the end, although perhaps just slightly less bright than his Holly wand. "Wingardium Leviosa" he said as he swung the wand over all of the other wands on the bed and sent them back to the box. They obediently returned and he smiled at the house elf.

"Thank you, Nebby, this is perfect. I will be able to use this until I can purchase my own wand."

The house elf bounced on her toes in excitement. "Nebby is so pleased young master is happy! Nebby will be returning these other wands to the Come-and-Go room now." She popped out again with a happy smile.

Harry took a deep breath and reviewed the new knowledge he had about the spell to help him remain incognito, and then pointed at himself with a flick and half swish as he said "Termino Agnitio". He felt a tingle of magic and hoped it worked. He would find out as time progressed, he guessed.

He closed his eyes and allowed his weary body to rest.

Harry woke to a quiet but insistent, "Mr. Black...Mr. Black." He cracked open one eye and saw what almost appeared to be an older version of himself. Then he saw the Auror robes and realized that he was looking at the counterpart of James Potter, his father. He opened both eyes and stared at the older man with almost a hungry expression. This was what his father would have looked like at this age!

James found the young man's intense stare was a bit odd, but put on his "friendly interrogator's" face. "I'm sorry to wake you Mr. Black, but I was hoping to take a few minutes of your time to get some of the unpleasant but necessary paperwork out of the way."

Harry blinked at his father's counterpart, slightly confused. Was this about him thrusting memories into Ron Weasley's twin? He pushed himself upright on his pillows and raked his hand through his hair. "Yes, of course Auror..Potter, was it?" He felt quite proud of his dissembling. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"Firstly, Mr. Black, could I have your full name, date of birth and nationality?"

Full name? Harry realized that he hadn't thought about a middle name. Well, he supposed his real name should be OK. "My name is Harrison James Black and I was born in Wales. However, the timeline seems to be a bit different than my own. I was born in 1980 and am nineteen years old. However, I understand that it's not 1999 and counterparts to people I knew are younger than I am. So whatever the ritual was that brought me here, time seems to have been a rather...flexible...concept."

The older man looked the younger one over closely. "So you are certain this is not your world? You seemed to believe you were hallucinating earlier."

Harry's lip curled in a grimace that held little amusement. "I didn't believe it at first, but I spent several hours going through newspapers. They were too elaborate to be figments of my imagination or an elaborate hoax. Plus too much is different from my own world."

"What about your physical condition when you arrived? According to Madame Pomfrey you had been tortured continually for several weeks. Do you know who was responsible?"

"Yes, but since it didn't occur here, I don't believe my kidnapping and torture is anything you can investigate. The people that did it aren't here."

James nodded regretfully, but was still curious about the young man before him. "But may I ask why were you taken prisoner and tortured? Surely that wasn't a common occurrence in your world?"

"Tom Riddle, the man you call Lord Slytherin, named himself Lord Voldemort in my world. While he had his minions use the Wizengamot to pass the laws he wanted, he took great pleasure in killing muggles, muggleborns, half-bloods and even purebloods that didn't support his agenda. I faced him several times and escaped each time, mostly through flukes and sheer dumb luck." Harry smiled wryly. "He took offense to my continued survival and I wound up as a guest in his dungeons so that he could personally express his... displeasure...with my continued existence."

The young man had been targeted by his world's version of Lord Slytherin and was able to be almost nonchalant, even amusing about it? That didn't make sense. "With all due respect, you are very young Mr. Black. Why would you have faced him multiple times?"

Harry gave a half-shrug. "He was much more violent in my world with a more hands-on approach. Once I survived the first time, I think planning my death became his new hobby."

James took a deep breath to hide an inappropriate smile at the teen's comment. The young man wasn't very forthcoming, but then he was right; the crimes committed against him hadn't been committed in this world. Well, except for one. "Mr. Black, the parents of the children that summoned you, including my wife and me, would like to meet with you. We would like to explain what happened, why and discuss the ritual they used. Would that be acceptable to you?"

Harry paused for a few moments. He would see Lily Potter; that might make the discomfort of seeing Molly and Arthur Weasley bearable. He had truly loved them and had been devastated when some of his "adopted" siblings had died in the war. But it would be nice to see functioning Longbottoms as well. He wished his Neville could have met them. "I think that can be managed, Mr. Potter. I have to admit to being very curious about the ritual that brought me here and what can be done to return me to my home."

James made sure to keep his face bland. If they were unable to return the young man to his own world, he might be more tempted to press charges against the children. "Would this evening be all right?"

Harry snorted and then at the Auror's raised eyebrow said, "I believe my engagement calendar is relatively free at the moment, sir."

James couldn't help but grin back at the young man. He liked his off-beat sense of humor.

After dinner, Harry slowly walked with the help of the cane to the Headmaster's office for the meeting with the parents of the children that summoned him. He had his Occlumency shields at full strength to help hide his emotions when he met Lily Potter.

As he approached the gargoyle that marked the entrance to the Headmaster's office, he was surprised to see a black-clad figure waiting for him. He was even more surprised when the man inclined his head and said politely, "Good evening Mr. Black. I am Professor Severus Snape, the Potions Master. The Headmaster asked me to wait for you as the staircase is password protected." He turned and whispered something quietly to the gargoyle, which promptly jumped aside revealing the stairs.

Snape stood back and waved a hand to indicate Harry should precede him. "Should I be worried that you knew the way to the Headmaster's office without assistance," he asked with a hint of a smile.

Harry was amazed at the man's demeanor. His world's Snape was a bitter and mean-spirited man who seemed to lack any sense of humor, while this man appeared practically good-natured by comparison. He paused as he started to pass the man in order to say, "It's a pleasure to meet you, Professor. It also gives me the opportunity to express my appreciation for the special nerve regeneration potions you've been brewing for me. The tremors have been getting better every day."

The Potions Master raised an eyebrow, but inclined his head. "You are welcome, Mr. Black." The two started up the stairs, moving slowly due to Harry's recovering injuries. As they reached the landing and Harry paused to catch his breath, he added, "I noticed you didn't comment on knowing the way to the Headmaster's office."

The younger man quirked his lips in a grin as he said, "I reserve the right to remain silent to avoid self-incrimination." The corners of the Potions Master's lips twitched as if amused before he indicated the already open door to the Headmaster's office.

Albus Dumbledore sat behind his desk while ten chairs were arranged in a semi-circle around it. As Harry and Severus entered the room, eight seated adults turned towards the two newcomers. "Welcome Mr. Black," said Dumbledore with a friendly smile. He noticed the younger man leaning heavily on the cane and added, "I hope the walk up here wasn't too uncomfortable?" He waved towards one of the two unused seats and stated, "Please, take a seat and rest while I introduce our other guests."

Harry decided it wouldn't look good if he collapsed during introductions, so accepted the offer and limped to an open chair. He sat heavily and couldn't help but breathe a sigh of relief as he took the weight off his healing legs and spine. "Thank you, Headmaster. As for the walk, I definitely need the exercise."

Severus took the open chair next to Harry and sat back, waiting for Albus to continue. Harry tried to focus on the elderly wizard to avoid looking at the Potters, who were seated nearest to him. He concentrated on his Occlumency shields again to ensure he would be able to contain his emotions.

"We appreciate you meeting with everyone tonight, Mr. Black. Farthest from you are Aurors Alice and Frank Longbottom. Their son Neville was part of the group that summoned you." Harry gave a polite half-smile and nodded at the couple. Alice Longbottom was a round-face woman with light brown hair and it was obvious that Neville inherited most of his looks from her. Her husband Frank had dark-blond short hair and sat with elegant posture of many purebloods.

"I'm delighted to see you so well recovered Mr. Black," said Alice kindly.

"Thank you, ma'am. The credit is all due to Madame Pomfrey and Potions Master Snape," responded Harry. "I wouldn't dare do anything but improve with both of them watching over me," he added with a smile. A restrained huff of amusement came from Snape on his right was echoed by James Potter on his left.

"Next to the Longbottoms are Doctors Granger. They are both dentists and the parents of Hermione Granger." Harry again nodded politely to the Muggle couple. "I appreciate you taking the time to come all of the way to Hogwarts. At least it gives you the opportunity to see your daughter's school."

"It's quite fascinating," said Hermione's mother, a woman with thick brown hair and warm chocolate-colored eyes. "The portraits are especially intriguing," added her husband, nodding. "We're grateful that the Headmaster sent Professor Snape for us. We're looking forward to seeing more."

"The lady and gentleman next to them are Molly and Arthur Weasley, the parents of Ron Weasley." Just as in his world, Arthur was a thin man with a ready smile. The little hair remaining on his head was as red as Ron's. Molly was short and slightly plumb with as kind of a face as he remembered. Both of them were in robes that showed some wear, indicating that they still struggled financially.

Molly spoke up immediately after the introduction. "We were appalled that our son was involved in the ritual that brought you here, Mr. Black. However, I'm pleased that by bringing you here, you received the healing you so desperately needed." Arthur nodded his agreement, but remained quiet even as his eyes scrutinized the recovering young man.

"Lastly, you've met Senior Auror James Potter. Beside him is his wife Lily. They are the parents of Sebastian and Holly Potter." He was familiar with the tall, thin, black-haired man already, and nodded politely to him. His eyes turned towards Lily Potter and he couldn't help but drink in her appearance like a starving man. Her almond-shaped eyes were the same brilliant green as his own, but her hair was dark red, styled to hang below her shoulders in gentle waves.

"I'm so pleased to see you feeling better, Mr. Black," she said with an almost melodic lilt to her voice. "But please be sure not to overtax yourself."

Harry felt his heart clench at what felt like motherly concern and he had to blink to avoid his eyes filling. "It's my pleasure to make your acquaintance, Mrs. Potter," he said softly. It was incredibly difficult to force himself to look away from her beautiful face, but he resolutely turned back to look at the Headmaster.

The aged wizard seemed to examine him intently for a moment before his grandfatherly face relaxed into a smile. He turned to the Potions Master and asked, "Severus, what can you tell us about the ritual used to summon Mr. Black?"

The Potions Master moved his chair slightly so that he could see everyone clearly. "Miss Granger was actually looking for a spell to summon a familiar for Mr. Longbottom when she came across a cross-reference of the ritual used. It was described as 'a rite to summon a champion'. That intrigued her enough to begin researching it. It required both runes and a ceremonial summoning.

The runes indicated the attributes they either wished the subject to already have or with which they wished the ritual to imbue him. I understand they used the runes for strength, power, courage, endurance, cleverness and compassion."

Harry kept his face blandly neutral as he listened to the Potions Master. It was hard to focus on his words as he was both amazed at and intrigued by the man's civility and cooperation. He forced himself to think about the runes. Did he possess those attributes? His world's Potion Master would disagree.

Severus continued, "The incantation was quite complex and I was at first surprised they were able to successfully complete it, but later learned that they actually spent several hours practicing. The ritual had a blood component involved. One member of the summoning team was supposed to provide seven drops of blood as a focus for the summoning, so that the 'champion' would be inclined to protect and assist that person."

Harry's carefully bland expression dropped momentarily as he frowned. He didn't like the sound of that. It sounded almost like a compulsion to him.

"It was intended that Mr. Longbottom provide the blood, as they wanted the 'champion' to take the onus of the expectations he bore on his young shoulders. However, he left the ritual knife across the room and none of them could leave their positions. Mr. Potter cut his hand on his belt buckle and dropped the requisite blood into the pentagram so that they could continue the ceremony."

The Potions Master looked at Harry with curious dark eyes. "Apparently out of all the people across any number of worlds, Mr. Black was found to meet the requirements of the ritual."

Albus spoke up then, "Can you tell us what happened, Mr. Black? Do you even remember being summoned?"

Harry took a deep breath and swept his eyes around the half circle of curious parents. "As you likely know, I was held prisoner by a dark lord of my world." At the Grangers' brief look of confusion, he added, "I mean that he was a wizard who reveled in the use of the dark arts. Magic can be dark, neutral or light, but it's really the intent of the caster, not the spell. In my world, this dark lord was quite evil and

had a following of sadists who enjoyed hurting others, especially those they considered beneath them. He had actually come into my cell to kill me, and if you saw my condition when I arrived, then you probably realize dying would have been a mercy. Just as I was about to collapse in anticipation of my death, I felt something like an extremely powerful portkey. I lost consciousness after it began pulling at me. I'm not sure what happened after that until I woke up in the Infirmary."

Snape filled in that information, "Your broken body crashed down into their pentagram and the children panicked and immediately called for help. Fortunately, many of the adults were together, including Madame Pomfrey. She was able to stabilize you at the scene and then brought you to Hogwarts to for further healing."

"Are you really from another world entirely, Mr. Black," asked Molly Weasley, her eyes warm with compassion.

"Yes ma'am, I am. I didn't think so at first. In fact, I thought my mind had snapped and that I was hallucinating while in the long-term ward at St. Mungo's." He smiled deprecatingly at the memory. "It wasn't until I went through nearly two years of newspapers that I realized that this was real and that this world was different in many ways from my own."

James put on a neutral face, but as a Senior Auror he had to ask, "Do you wish to press charges of kidnapping against the children, Mr. Black?"

Harry blinked in surprise. Now that was a question he hadn't expected, but it did make sense. He leaned back and considered the question before finally shaking his head slowly. "I'm not especially pleased to find myself in a foreign world without my friends or resources. I suppose it was an abduction, since no one asked me whether I willing to come. What bothers me is that there doesn't seem to be a reversal of the spell." He looked at Snape for confirmation and felt his shoulders drop as the man shook his head. "However, what benefit would there be in pressing formal charges against your children? I understand their desire to have a 'champion' who could remove the evil of the world and it's difficult for impulsive teens to always think things through."

He looked around at the parents who were showing blossoming hope. "I will leave it to you as their parents to impress on them the severity of their actions and the impact to an innocent man."

All of the parents seemed to breathe easier and they each offered a heart-felt "thank you".

"I would like to understand why the five of them felt compelled to perform the ritual, though. I remember them saying something about Neville, but I didn't quite understand."

Frank Longbottom practically growled out, "It all goes back to that blasted reporter, Rita Skeeter. My wife and I are both Aurors, and we had been assigned to the cases surrounding escalating violence towards muggleborns. We believe our investigation focused their attention on us. Our ancestral estate was guarded by various very ancient wards, but somehow a group found a way to implode the wards, crushing a wing of the house, including Neville's nursery. It was a two-story structure and it was reduced to rubble." He paused as the memory of seeing the rubble and thinking his son dead caught up to him.

Alice rubbed his arm gently and took up the story. "Frank's mother was safe in another wing of the house that wasn't damaged badly, but the wing with our son was totally collapsed. Somehow, two pieces of wood came down in a wedge shape and protected him from being crushed. Rita Skeeter," here her voice became venomous, "wrote about the attack and Neville's miraculous survival. She said only a boy with a Destiny – and yes she used capital letters – could have survived. She even started calling him "the boy-with-a-destiny" and declared that he must have been somehow saved by Magic itself and perhaps he would be a savior and guardian of the people." She shook her head in exasperation. "It was all rubbish, of course, but the public ate it up. She wrote several stories every year, usually on his birthday and the anniversary of the attack to keep him in the public eye. Since he started school, she's been increasing the stories. What's ridiculous is the number of people that believe it and who actually write him to ask what he's going to do to stop the escalating violence."

To Harry it sounded as if Neville had gone through much of the publicity that "the-boy-who-lived" had endured. "No boy should have

to grow up with that type of pressure," he said indignantly. "Thank you for explaining what motivated them."

"We all thank you for your understanding, Mr. Black," injected the Headmaster. "I think we all expected a much angrier response."

"I had already accepted my death, Headmaster. I think it's harder for me to adjust to actually being alive than it is to be in a different world just yet. I only regret that my friends won't know what happened to me. They are going to be very upset."

"Oh dear, your parents! I can't imagine what they're going through," exclaimed a concerned Molly Weasley.

"My parents died while I was still a toddler and I have no relatives that will be concerned with my disappearance. I do worry about my friends though; some of them are like adopted family."

With the concern for the children negated, Albus turned to the Grangers and asked whether they would like Hermione to give them a tour of the school. At their delighted affirmation, he summoned a house elf to take them to her. Harry realized that the room now only contained Order members and hid a sneer at the Headmaster's manipulations.

Once the Muggle couple left the room, the Headmaster broached the next topic. "Mr. Black, the children had a reason to be concerned about Lord Slytherin. He started out purely as a political figure several decades ago, but we have reason to believe that he is tied to some very dark associates and events. Unfortunately, it's been very hard to link him directly to criminal activities. Who was the dark lord that captured you? You mentioned the term 'Death Eaters' as I recall."

Harry took a deep breath and tried to figure out how to summarize Voldemort. "Tom Marvolo Riddle was a descendent of Salazar Slytherin through the Gaunt family line. Although a pureblood, Merope Gaunt fell in love with a local affluent Muggle, Tom Riddle, and used a love potion to get him to marry her. Once she stopped using the potion, he abandoned his wife and unborn child. She gave birth in a Muggle area and then died. Her son was raised in a Muggle orphanage and didn't learn about the wizarding world until his Hogwarts letter came. While at Hogwarts, he was both intelligent

and charismatic, and no one realized he was delving deeply into the dark arts. In fact, he was made Head Boy in his Seventh Year. He re-arranged the letters of his name to say 'I am Lord Voldemort' and refused to acknowledge his Muggle side. In fact, he later killed his father and paternal grandparents in retaliation for his father's abandonment. He gathered followers, who he marked with a tattoo of a skull and snake, and those followers were called Death Eaters."

Harry took a breath before continuing, ignoring the looks of apprehension on his listener's faces. "Their objective was to secure the wizarding world from the non-magical one. Voldemort didn't believe in permitting muggleborns into our magic schools and our culture." He paused and then added, "I should mention that he also became insane over time due to some particularly foul rituals he used on himself. Once he lost his grip on sanity, it was a downwards spiral as he became increasingly more sadistic and cruel. His strategies were poorly thought out and he even began torturing his own followers for any perceived infraction. It was rather ugly."

"From the little I read in the newspapers, there are significant differences between our worlds, although I did notice that this world had an increase in violence towards muggleborns from the 80's forward."

"When you say there are significant differences, what types of disparities do you mean," asked Frank Longbottom.

He decided to avoid mentioning the first war with Voldemort, as he didn't want to have to explain that the Dark Lord had gone after the Potters and their son survived. "Well, did anyone open the Chamber of Secrets in the last fifty years?" asked Harry.

"The Chamber of Secrets? Surely that is a myth?" asked Snape with a frown.

"No, I wouldn't be surprised if each of the Founders created secure areas. Slytherin's was underground. He also left a basilisk in hibernation to protect the school in case of attack. Riddle discovered the chamber and woke and gained control of the basilisk while he was a student in my world."

James looked at him curiously. "Your medical records indicated that you were bit by a basilisk when you were twelve."

Harry raised an eyebrow at him. "I didn't realize that medical records weren't kept confidential in this world."

"We believed you to be a victim of a crime committed here at first," said James. "I needed an official copy for the investigation."

Harry nodded, although he still didn't like having his personal information bandied about. "I guess I can understand that. And yes, a dark artifact was able to possess a student and through her the Chamber was opened again. I found the entrance but had to fight the basilisk. Its fang went through my arm when I stabbed it in the roof of its mouth."

"Basilisk venom is highly toxic," Snape commented mildly although his eyes raked Harry's face as if looking for remnants of basilisk venom.

"Very," the teen remarked calmly. "I could feel myself dying as the venom raced through my system, but Fawkes came and cried on the wound." He looked in gratitude at the counterpart of the phoenix who saved him. To everyone's surprise, Fawkes responded by launching himself from his perch, landing on Harry's shoulder, and rubbing his hand against Harry's cheek until the young man began scratching behind his head.

"Amazing," Dumbledore marveled. "He rarely responds so favorably to strangers. Although he did join you in the Infirmary while you were in a healing coma."

Harry smiled at the phoenix and continued scratching it for a few moments before a thought struck him. "Has a Tri-Wizard Tournament been held recently?"

Albus looked at the young man over his glasses. "The Headmasters of Durmstrang have brought it up several times over the last few decades as a method of fostering international cooperation, but I refuse to put any of my students into a potentially lethal competition." He frowned before asking, "Did your Albus Dumbledore agree to it?"

Harry scowled, but quickly regained his temper as Fawkes trilled a soothing melody. "It was held here at Hogwarts during my Fourth

Year. One of Voldemort's minions spent the year Polyjuiced as our DADA instructor, and he confounded the Goblet of Fire to believe there were four schools in the Tournament. Of course my name was the only one submitted for the fourth school. I was forced to participate as supposedly it was a magically binding contract."

Albus looked horror-stricken. "But if you were fourteen, then it should have required your parent's..excuse me, your legal guardian's consent. Surely they didn't give it?"

Harry's face was closed as he responded, "They were never asked; I was just told I had to participate. Personally, I think the Headmaster decided it would draw out whoever was trying to kill me that year."

Molly Weasley looked between the elderly and younger wizard in some confusion. "What is this Tournament? Why would it be potentially lethal to students?"

Harry gestured to the Headmaster to answer the question. He was surprised that this Dumbledore thought the concept inappropriate for students. Albus explained in a voice heavy with disapproval. "The Triwizard Tournament was a magical contest held between the three largest wizarding schools of Europe; Hogwarts, Durmstrang and Beauxbatons. The first Tournament was held at the end of the eleventh century, with each of the three schools being represented by one Champion apiece. The tournament required the Champions to compete in three tasks designed to test their magical ability, their courage and their intelligence. However, the Tournament was extremely dangerous, and more than one school champion died while competing. The competition was discontinued near the beginning of the eighteenth century when the death toll became too high."

Molly Weasley gasped in outrage, "Students died! Sweet Circe, how could any responsible parent sanction such a thing?"

Albus looked rather ill as he asked, "What were the tasks in your Tournament, Mr. Black?"

Harry's eyes darkened for a moment and Fawkes trilled again. "We had to take an artificial egg from a nesting mother dragon in the first task." He was secretly pleased at the cries of outrage from the

parents present. Nesting mother dragons were known to viciously protect their eggs. "The egg contained the clue in Mermish that something we held dear would be taken hostage and lost forever if not retrieved in an hour. They kidnapped my best friend. The Beauxbaton's Champion had her little nine year old sister taken, while the other two had their girlfriends taken. All of the hostages were placed in stasis and held under the lake at the Mer village." He looked up under his lashes at the outraged parents and added innocently, "Interestingly, none of the parents of the hostages were asked for their approval for their children to be used in such a way." He sat back in his chair and enjoyed the screeches of fury of the protective parents.

Albus appeared quite pale as he asked, "And the final task?"

"A maze filled with acromantulas, blast-ended skrewts, a sphinx, an anti-gravity mist, etc. The first person to reach a Cup would win the event. The Cup was also a portkey that would carry the winner out of the maze and back to the waiting officials. Unfortunately, one of Voldemort's minions changed the Cup into a port key for a location off of the school grounds." Harry's featured hardened with pain and loss momentarily before he smoothed it out.

"What happened," asked Albus gently.

"Cedric Diggory and I took the Cup together and arrived at a cemetery. He was killed immediately as a 'spare'." He heard Molly Weasley gasp in shock. "My blood was used in a vile ritual to bring Voldemort from wraith-form back into a body. I was eventually able to get back to Cedric's body and summon the Cup, which was still a two-way port key."

Harry shuddered slightly and forced the memories away. He looked at the Headmaster and asked, "As I mentioned, Riddle marked his followers with a skull and snake, which they called the Dark Mark. Through it, he was able to summon his followers, or torture them as the mood struck him. Does he mark his followers here?"

The Headmaster seemed to have to deliberately focus on the new topic as his mind seemed to be filled with the dangers the students had experienced. He finally responded, "There is a suggestion that some of his followers bear a snake tattoo, in honor of Slytherin's heritage. Unfortunately, anyone involved in an act of violence was

wearing a hood spelled to prevent seeing their features, so we have limited information as to who is actually involved."

"In my world, there was a spy in his Inner Circle. I hope you have the same?" He assiduously avoided looking at the Potions Master.

Albus smiled slightly at him over his glasses. "I'm sure you realize that information is not something we could confirm or deny; if we had such a spy, it would put him or her at risk."

Lily asked the young man gently, "What about you, Mr. Black? You said you were an orphan, but surely there must be some parallel family here that we can contact for you?"

James added, "Are you related to Sirius Black in your world by any chance?" Dumbledore hadn't gotten a straight answer to the question before and he wondered what would happen if the young man was pressed.

"There's no one to contact." Harry hesitated and then said, "I do have one question though, is Peter Pettigrew alive in this world?"

James and Lily exchanged a look before James said cautiously, "Why do you ask?"

"As I said, many things are different between our worlds. Pettigrew was a Death Eater in my world. He's the one that cast the Avada Kedavra on Cedric. I don't know what he is here, but I would prefer not to run into him. While I will try to remember I'm in a different reality, I might cast first with a few people."

"Who else might draw that reaction, Mr. Black," asked James coldly and with some severity.

Harry didn't fail to notice that no one answered the question about Pettigrew, but still responded simply, "Bellatrix Lestrange for one. Lucius Malfoy for another. All three factored heavily into my holiday in Club Voldemort." His brilliant green eyes seemed to burn with intensity as his voice turned icy, "All three have performed such vile deeds that would make any moral and honorable person nauseous."

"Bellatrix Lestrange, born Bellatrix Black as well as Lucius Malfoy are known to support the blood purist philosophy. However, Peter

Pettigrew is a friend of ours. We've known him for over twenty years and trust him completely."

Harry raised an eyebrow at James strong reaction. "Have you checked him for Slytherin's tattoo?"

James voice became frigid as he responded harshly, "We have his Oath. Any action taken against Peter for behaviors his look-alike did in your world will be met with severe consequences."

Harry nodded curtly. "Then I suggest you warn him to stay away from me. I lost count of how many of my bones he broke while I was a prisoner and he cast the Cruciatus curse on me at least a dozen times."

Molly looked rather ill while Lily appeared dismayed at his statement. Alice Longbottom deflected the rising tempers with a quick question, "Was Slytherin defeated in your world, Mr. Black?"

Harry looked at the short-haired brunette and smiled softly to see the intelligence in her eyes, versus the blank child-like look she bore in his own world. "Yes, but I don't think the same death will be feasible here."

"Why not?" asked Alice with evident disappointment.

"Anything you can tell us that could help defeat him is important!" said Frank forcefully.

Harry smiled grimly, "Because someone literally ripped out his heart. The important thing to learn is whether he's taken any steps towards immortality in this world."

"Immortality? What do you mean?" Albus leaned forward to stare at Harry intensely, as if to pry out his secrets, but Harry felt no nudges against his Occlumency shields.

Harry rubbed his eyes tiredly. He didn't want to discuss horcruxes with people that never heard of them. The fewer that knew, the better. "Voldemort underwent some rituals that would ensure his soul was 'anchored' to my world. If his body was killed, his soul would survive in wraith form until he could possess or create a new

body. However, as your Riddle still appears human, I don't know if he's gone to such extremes."

Albus' eyes widened slightly as a look of revulsion briefly crossed his features. "We will certainly investigate that, Mr. Black." His face resumed his typically friendly expression. "Now, I have a question for you personally. As you mentioned, you were dropped into this world with no resources. What career were you pursuing in your world? Perhaps we can help you obtain employment once you recover."

"I had originally planned to be an Auror, but I lost my trust of the Ministry over time which caused me to reconsider that goal." The Longbottoms and Potters exchanged questioning gazes. "I thought about pursuing my Defense Mastery or perhaps Warding and Curse-Breaking. Unfortunately, the NEWTs I took in my world won't be reflected here. I might need to study and retake them."

"All of those are very worthy pursuits," said Albus with a smile. "The Weasley's oldest son is a Curse-Breaker for Gringotts." Arthur beamed proudly while Molly nodded at the young man encouragingly. "What were your NEWT scores in your world?"

"I had an O in DADA, Charms, and Care of Magical Creatures. I had an Exceeds in Potions, Herbology and Transfiguration. I was pants at Divination." He grinned at the admission and wasn't surprised at the corresponding humor in Dumbledore's eyes. "I've since studied Arithmancy and Ancient Runes and might try those as well if I can prepare adequately."

To Harry's amazement Snape suggested, "You are welcome to sit in on some of my NEWT Potion classes, although I will schedule some time where you can prepare a few potions privately before then to confirm that you have an appropriate level of expertise with this world's students."

"Excellent Severus," Dumbledore beamed. "I'm certain that Professors Black, McGonagall and Flitwick would also be willing to have you audit some of their classes. In fact, Mrs. Potter is working on a project with Professor Flitwick and occasionally helps out in his classes. If you are going to audit some classes, perhaps we could find you quarters here in the castle for the time being."

Harry allowed his face to show surprised pleasure and inclined his head in gratitude. That had been easy!

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Chapter 5 – Unexpected Resources

Harry woke up abruptly, his heart pounding erratically and his throat hoarse from screaming. He untwisted himself from the sheets and stared out into the unfamiliar surroundings for several seconds until his terror-filled mind recognized the guest quarters he had moved into the night before. He took the borrowed wand from his night stand, cast a quick Tempus and frowned at realizing it wasn't quite five o'clock. The teen sighed heavily, but walked to the ensuite bathroom to prepare for the day, knowing he wouldn't sleep any more. Madame Pomfrey had asked the elves to make him several pants and shirts, so that he didn't have to transfigure his clothing every day, which had been a nice surprise.

Once dressed for the day, Harry took some time to look around his new quarters some more. The rooms were located near the school Library and the hallway guardian portrait opened onto a large sitting room with a fireplace. Empty shelves were on either side of the fireplace, perfect for books or display items. "Of course, I have neither," Harry muttered to himself. A sofa faced the fireplace and two chairs rested nearby. He was pleased to see a decent sized desk faced out into the room. That would be useful in his research about this place. However, he needed so much!

Besides the sitting room, the suite contained one bedroom, an ensuite bath, and a small kitchenette that included a table and four chairs. Dumbledore himself had shown the rooms to Harry and had mentioned, "Feel free to use this kitchen, but I should point out that the house elves will likely feel slighted if you choose to bypass their services too often."

When Harry had seen the fireplace, he had requested that Healer MacMillian be permitted access to visit for their sessions, and also that he be permitted to Floo in and out as needed. "Are you planning to come and go frequently, Mr. Black," asked Dumbledore with some concern. While Fawkes had vetted the young man, he wasn't comfortable giving anyone but the staff access to the Floo system.

"I have no clothing, no possessions and a borrowed wand, Headmaster," replied Harry dryly. "Don't you think that I'll need to resolve that once I have the funds? Or would you prefer that I walk several miles on foot in the middle of winter to Hogsmeade to find a public Floo every time I need to go some place?"

"No, no, I quite understand my boy," replied Dumbledore hastily. He modified the wards to permit the staff, the healer and Harry access to that Floo. Perhaps he needed to find employment for the young man here in the castle to help him accumulate the funds needed to replace his belongings, Dumbledore mused.

Harry made himself a pot of tea and sat in front of the fireplace, sipping it slowly. Healer MacMillian said he would stop by immediately after breakfast. He hoped that would be by eight o'clock. With several hours to waste, Harry dropped into a meditative state and once again began cataloging and filing the new information from Voldemort. He was still surprised at the sheer volume of spells, political information and history that the man knew. He paused and chuckled when he found information about the passage to the Chamber of Secrets that he had never known. "I only had to ask for stairs inside of sliding down a filthy pipe? Well, I guess sliding wouldn't have been very dignified for Salazar Slytherin."

A slight chime from the fireplace wards drew his attention back to the corporeal world as it announced that the Floo was active. He stood up as the Floo flared green and Healer MacMillian stepped out.

Harry was pleased that his voice was steady as he greeted the Healer. "Good morning Healer MacMillian. May I offer you a cup of tea?"

The older man bestowed his typical warm smile on the younger man. "Good morning, Mr. Black. How did you sleep last night?"

Harry successfully stopped himself from rolling his eyes. "And here I thought I looked and sounded perfectly fine," he complained as he prepared a cup of tea the way the Healer preferred it.

The Healer took the chair to the left of the fireplace and sipped his tea. "Sometimes a burden is lightened if shared," he replied.

The teen gripped his tea cup tightly until he felt the china begin to crack and abruptly set it down. "I dreamt about my first day in captivity with Voldemort and his Death Eaters," he said hesitantly. "I was trying to track down some...dark artifacts that Voldemort needed, and they caught me when I was too exhausted to notice them taking down the temporary wards around my camp site. They

stunned me and didn't wake me up until I was in a cell at Voldemort's headquarters."

He awoke to see Lucius Malfoy, Bellatrix Lestrange, Walden McNair and towering over him as he lay on a cold stone floor in a body bind. With much mocking and sneering at his incompetence, they removed his robes and chained his wrists to manacles in the wall. Now he could see Voldemort himself watching the proceedings with a malicious smirk on his nearly invisible lips. Harry looked away from the Death Eaters only to realize that there were red splatters on the walls and floor, presumably from the cell's previous occupant.

McNair smiled cruelly as he released the body bind and then ripped Harry's shirt open causing the buttons to bounce across the floor, exposing white, goose bumpy skin. Bellatrix kicked his legs away so that he fell awkwardly to his knees. He stayed where he was, only looking up enough to glare at his captors and spit out with his voice dripping sarcasm. "It must make you feel so very powerful to defeat a partially trained teenager. Great job!"

"It appears that Mr. Potter fails to appreciate his status as my guest," Voldemort commented. He gestured to Lucius, "I think he needs to be rebuked for his lack of courtesy, Lucius." The teen didn't scream through the first bout of Cruciatus, nor through the second. By the third, his whole body trembled and writhed, but his jaws remained locked together even though it felt like searing hot barbed wire was being dragged through every nerve and vein. He tried to focus on just not screaming, but couldn't keep the pained grunts that spilled from between his clenched teeth as each curse ripped and tore through him. He was only vaguely aware that each of the Death Eaters took a turn at cursing him.

At some point the pain stopped, and all he could hear was his own rasping gulps of air and a steady drip-drip-drip near him. He hoped it was water that he would be able to reach. It wasn't for a long time that he realized it was the sound of his own blood dripping down to the cold stone floor. It was even longer before he realized that they had never asked him a single question.

Harry covered his face with his hands, as he added, "That was my first day there. I'm not sure how long they held me prisoner, but I think it was about a month." He looked up at the Mind Healer. "To be

absolutely honest, I'm surprised I had a nightmare about that day; most that followed were much worse."

Preston leaned forward in his chair and spoke calmly and compassionately. "Thank you for sharing that with me, Mr. Black."

"Harry," the younger man interrupted. "Just call me Harry."

"Thank you, Harry. The offer to call me Preston is always open to you." He waited for the teen to nod, and then continued, "I am not surprised that you remembered the first night, as it was the forerunner of everything that followed. I hope you realize that having the nightmares is a very normal reaction. It's not a sign of weakness or disability. What I can help you do is learn to confront what happened to you and learn to accept it as a part of your past."

The teen looked at him with clear signs of disbelief and Preston smiled encouragingly. "It's only natural to want to avoid painful memories and feelings. But if you try to numb yourself and push your memories away, the nightmares will likely not only continue, but could get worse. None of us can escape our emotions completely – they emerge under stress or whenever we let down our guard – and trying to do so is exhausting. The avoidance will ultimately harm our relationships, our ability to function, and the quality of our life."

Harry filled his tea cup again as he tried to calm himself and considered the older man's comments. "What do you recommend?"

"Our discussions will help relieve your symptoms by helping you deal with the trauma you've experienced. Rather than avoiding the ordeal and any reminder of it, I will encourage you to recall and cope with the emotions and sensations you felt during your imprisonment. My goal is that in addition to offering you an outlet for emotions you've been bottling up, our discussions will also help restore your sense of control and reduce the powerful hold the memory of the trauma has on your life."

"I do feel very out of control," Harry admitted reluctantly. "The cell they had me in suppressed my magic, and as hard as I tried, I couldn't fight back. And then I was brought here, and I have nothing. I feel like I'm Fate's chew toy. I would much rather feel like I'm in control of my own destiny. Can you help me make that happen?"

"I think we can work on that together, Harry," the Mind Healer replied calmly. "So that you know what to expect, together we will explore the trauma and the resulting thoughts and feelings about it. To be honest, I expect some of those feelings may be guilt that you couldn't fight back, but together we'll gain a fresh perspective of what really happened. We will also help you learn how to not only cope with the memories and nightmares, but how to control them. Does that sound like a plan you can support?"

"I'm not very good with talking about my feelings," Harry admitted. "I rarely had an adult I could count on as I grew up and I'm used to being fairly independent and dealing with everything on my own."

"We can talk about that as well, if you would like," Preston responded. "However, you don't have to be alone. I respect your independence, but everyone needs a helping hand at some point in their life." He held out a hand to the teen.

Harry looked at the hand and back at Preston. "You're pretty good, you know that," he murmured, but reached out and clasped the other man's hand slowly. "It's a deal."

The teen felt emotionally exhausted after his discussion with Preston MacMillan, but he also felt a bit lighter. He wasn't sure how far he was willing to take the trust that was building for the man, but at least he was willing to discuss his stay at Club Voldemort with him. If he could only lessen how often he had the nightmares, it would be worth it. Feeling too tired to think properly, he decided to take a quick nap.

Harry woke up in a little over an hour and felt refreshed and ready to confront some of the other challenges facing him. "Now what," he muttered to himself. "Where do I go from here? I have no money, a borrowed wand and no other resources. I have only two changes of clothing. I need a wand tuned to me, a wardrobe, potion ingredients and that all means galleons. So I either need a job or another way to make some gold."

He made a mental list that included applying for jobs at stores in Hogsmeade and shops in Diagon Alley; collecting rare potion ingredients in the Forbidden Forest and selling them; and even offering himself as a tutor for younger students. "No, that last won't

work until I'm allowed to re-take my NEWTs, and I need resources before then."

He stood and paced slowly back and forth across the sitting room, stretching the muscles and joints. "Bah, I should just offer tours of the Chamber of Secrets, one galleon a trip," he muttered sarcastically. He stopped mid-stride and a slow smile began to spread over his face. "OK, I'll need a big bag...or one with magically enhanced space. I wonder..."

He left his quarters and headed to the seventh floor. By the time he reached the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy, he was leaning heavily on the cane again. He leaned against the tapestry for several long moments, catching his breath, and then began to walk back and forth thinking, "I need the room of forgotten and abandoned things". After his third pass, a large wooden door appeared and he hurried across the hall to open it. One inside, he smiled in relief at seeing an enormous room filled with aisle upon aisle of broken and damaged furniture, books by the thousands, chipped bottles of congealed potions, rusting swords and bloodstained battleaxes as well as a myriad of clothing scattered around the room.

He stood at the back of the room and took out his borrowed wand. "Accio wand holster," he said as a test. He had to duck as a dozen or more wrist and forearm holsters rushed towards him. He grinned and examined each one and was pleased to see one of the forearm holsters was perfectly serviceable, if in need of some oiling. He affixed it to his forearm and then turned back to the room.

"Accio Bag of Holding," he called out directing the wand towards the room's clutter. Three bags hurtled towards him, and he caught them with a Seeker's reflex. He examined the first, but it was torn down the middle, making it ineffective. The second appeared to have been thoroughly chewed by something, and he discarded that as well. However, while the third had a tear, it was on the seam and appeared to be repairable, albeit the bag was a bit shiny with wear. It looked like a common cloth sack roughly the length of his forearm, but when he opened it, he was able to fit his arm up to his shoulder inside and it still felt like there was plenty of space.

Before he left the room, he remembered Ravenclaw's diadem and tried to remember where he had seen the tarnished tiara that he had used to help mark where he had hidden the book from the Half-

Blood Prince. He found the vanishing cabinet and made a point of both locking and shrinking it, and then looked for the bust upon which he had noticed the tiara. When he saw the bust was uncrowned, he crossed his fingers and hoped that it had never held the diadem, and that it was still lost in Albania where Helena Ravenclaw had hidden it.

Harry limped slowly down to the kitchen. He smiled at seeing the portrait of the bowl of fruit again and tickled the pear, causing the door handle to appear. He entered the bustling room, although it wasn't nearly as busy as it would be in two days when the students returned.

"Mr. Black, sir!" a happy voice called and Nebby came up to see him. "Mr. Black was not at breakfast and is needing proper nourishment to recover." She tugged at his free hand and took him to a table and pulled out a chair. "Nebby will be making a proper brunch for the young master!"

Before she could run away, he presented the bag of holding asked, "Nebby, are there any house elves who could repair this bag for me?"

The elf took the bag from his hand and examined it critically before nodding so quickly her ears flapped. "This is being an easy repair with house elf magic. Nebby will be asking one of the sewing elves to repair it while the young Master eats." She popped away with the bag in her hand.

He sat and grinned with a little embarrassment at the elves that seemed to be watching him. They smiled hesitantly back and then returned to their labors, but kept an eye on him in case he wanted something. Within a few minutes, Nebby returned with a tray laden with a ham and cheese omelet, a bowl of fresh cut fruit, a cup of steaming vegetable soup, a loaf of fresh bread along with a variety of jams, and a pot of tea. Having skipped his breakfast, Harry made a good effort at consuming most of the enormous brunch provided. When he finally pushed the remaining food away, Nebby immediately appeared.

"Young Master is doing credit to the house elves by eating so well," she said approvingly. She handed him the repaired bag and snapped her fingers, causing the dirty dishes to disappear.

"Please thank everyone who made that delicious meal and also the one who repaired the bag," Harry said as he stood up. "I couldn't ask for better service." Small gasps were heard around the room and the teen looked up in surprise to see half the house elves in the room staring at him with large eyes. Nebby waved a hand at them and they returned to their work with renewed vigor. "You is very kind to the house elves, young Master. We is pleased to be helping." She bowed and disappeared with a pop.

Harry smiled, remembering how Dobby had always been exceptionally emotional at being thanked as well. He nodded to the room at large and left the kitchen, where small whispered conversation sprung up after he left.

Considering it was now heading towards the lunch hour, Harry thought he might be able to make his next stop unseen. Having rested while eating, Harry was able to walk to the second floor girl's bathroom with little difficulty. He slipped inside and said, "Myrtle?" There was no answer, and since the Headmaster wasn't aware of the Chamber being opened fifty years ago, he hoped that Myrtle hadn't been killed by the basilisk in this world.

He moved over to the row of sinks and found the snake-engraved tap. "Open up" he hissed to the snake. With a rumble, the sink began to recess into the floor, revealing a large passage leading towards. Remembering the information he had gained from Voldemort, he hissed "Stairs" and with a rumble, stairs began to appear where none had been before. "Lights" he commanded, and a series of torches immediately lit the passageway.

"Much better than jumping down a dark filth-encrusted pipe," he thought as he walked down the stairs. When he reached the bottom, the torches revealed the skeletons of many small animals littering the floor. He moved forward until he reached the gigantic skin shed by the basilisk that he remembered from his trip in Second Year. He cast a quick Scourgify on the skin and then lifted one of the torches from the wall and examined the hide closely. Although it had lain there for an unknown number of years, it did not seem to be damaged or decayed in any way.

Harry took out the bag of holding and then began to fold the skin as best as he could into the bag. Foot after foot began to disappear into

the bag and still he continued folding and packing it. It took nearly twenty minutes, but eventually the entire shed skin fit into the bag. He grinned as it felt like it only weighed a few pounds and happily tied the bag to his belt.

He retraced his steps up the stairs, moving carefully with his cane to avoid falling. Once back in the girl's bathroom, he reversed his commands, extinguishing the torches, removing the stairs and closing the passage way. With a smile of satisfaction, he returned to his quarters, ready for an hour's nap.

When Harry awoke, he reviewed his mental list of what he wanted to accomplish in Diagon Alley. He needed to sell the basilisk skin, open a Gringott's account, buy a new wand, purchase a new wardrobe, procure potion-making equipment and supplies, as well as parchment paper and sealing wax. If he had time, he wanted to visit Muggle London for a steel-tipped fountain pen and some Muggle clothing.

In order for anything else to work, he first had to find a buyer for the basilisk skin. He picked up the bag of holding and headed to the Floo. He withdrew the borrowed wand from the holster and cast Incendio at the grate. Flames sprang up immediately. Looking at the tiny pot, he realized that although Dumbledore had permitted Preston access to the Floo network, he had only provided a minimal amount of Floo powder. He added that to his shopping list as well. He threw the remaining powder into the Floo, called out, "The Leaky Cauldron" and stepped into the flames.

He stumbled as he was spit out into the dark pub, and mentally cursed his world's Dumbledore for leaving him to be raised in the Muggle world. "One of these days, I'm going to spend an entire day Floo'ing from one location to another, until I can do it gracefully," he promised himself. He smiled at seeing the nearly toothless face of Tom behind the bar, but only nodded politely and headed out to the small walled courtyard in the back. He had to remember that this Tom didn't know him.

He tapped the sequence in the brick wall, which revealed the archway into the familiar cobbled street of the popular shopping district. He passed the first half dozen store fronts and opened the door into Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions.

"Good afternoon, sir," said the friendly and familiar voice of Madame Malkin. "How may I help you today?" She looked curiously at the young man.

"Good afternoon Madame," he replied courteously. "I will need to return later today for a new wardrobe, but at the moment I'm wondering if you could direct me to someone who sells dragon hide or basilisk armor or battle robes."

The older woman considered for a moment before replying, "Gwilym Dewrwas is located at the corner of Diagon Alley and Knockturn Alley. He makes a variety of dragon hide armor, boots and gloves as well as dueling robes. I don't know if he also makes battle robes; there's not a large market for them. He's a good man, Gwilym; he studied the craft from his father and grandfather before him."

Harry gave a slight bow to the shop keeper and said, "Thank you, Madame. I will be back later today to see about outfitting myself."

He headed towards the juncture of the two streets and realized that the store front faced into Knockturn Alley, which is probably why he didn't remember it. In his world, he had been forbidden to venture into the dark and twisted street, as not only were the wares a bit dodgy, but the witches and wizards found within were considered suspicious as well.

He opened the door and heard a bell ring as he crossed the threshold. A middle-aged man with a large nearly black moustache came out of a room in back, and wiped his hands on a towel. His long fingers seemed stained with shades of brown and black, as though he frequently dyed his materials. Harry had an impression of droopy brown eyes set into a lean face. He was dressed in black with a brown leather apron covering his chest and half of his thighs.

"Good afternoon, young man. I'm Gwilym Dewrwas, the proprietor of the shop. Are you just looking today, or is there something specific you were interested in?"

Harry inclined his head politely. "Madame Malkin sent me to you. I am looking for both armor and battle robes." He looked around the shop and saw a wide variety of dragon hide clothing already made. "I was hoping to find basilisk armor."

"Ah, and I would love to sell you some, my young friend. Unfortunately, basilisk hide is very rare and hard to come by. It would likely bankrupt a wealthy family to make a full suit. I have but a single vest in the store and that is over four thousand galleons." He pointed to a display up on the wall of a dark vest with silver stitching; an obviously prized piece. Dewrwas grinned suddenly and his face seemed much younger as a result. "The armor I could make if I had sufficient quantities of basilisk hide." He sighed and shook his head. "Shall I show you what we have in dragon hide?"

Harry cocked his head at the man and gave him a small grin. "Tell me, could you make decent armor from a shed skin? I know it's not the same as the hide off a fresh corpse, but it would bear many of the same properties, wouldn't it?"

Dewrwas chewed on his moustache for a moment as he evaluated the young man before him. "I would have to see the skin of course, but I would think it would still be better than dragon hide."

Harry walked to the counter and laid his bag of holding across the wooden top. He opened it and pulled out a foot or so of the shed basilisk skin. The armorer's eyes opened wide and he lifted the skin, inadvertently pulling even more out of the sack. He opened it and held it up to the light, then excused himself and came back with a bowl and cloth. He looked to Harry for permission, and at his nod, he wiped the skin down, making each nearly black scale stand out.

He looked up Harry, unable to mask his excitement. "How much do you have," he asked and nearly held his breath as he waited for the answer.

"At least fifteen meters, perhaps more," Harry replied with a slight smirk.

"You're serious?" He looked at the material in his hands and tugged a little more out of the bag. "Oh, I see."

"I was thinking about auctioning it, but if you're willing to give me a decent price and make me a full suit as part of the deal, perhaps I won't have to auction it, and you can corner the market on basilisk armor."

An hour of fierce negotiation later after the armorer had examined every inch of the skin in excruciating detail, Dewrwas grinned and said "Done!" He extended his hand for Harry to shake and they sealed the deal with a binding oath. They had agreed on a fair price for them both, plus a full suit for Harry including tunic, pants, boots (with a hidden sheath for a dagger), gloves and wand holster. In addition, Harry purchased a pair of black dragon hide boots and cloak. Harry stood for ten minutes while the armorer measured every part of him, making careful notations on a scroll.

"Now, I'll write the letter to Gringotts authorizing the transfer of funds and you can return in two weeks for the armor, or I can notify you as each piece is finished."

"I'll be happy to return in two weeks," replied Harry with a relieved smile. "That's faster than I expected you to be done. I know how difficult it is to work with magical materials."

"Ah, but this is going to be a pleasure! I doubt I'll be sleeping much for the next two weeks. Your suit will be my masterpiece. Perhaps you wouldn't mind letting me take some pictures when you try it on?"

Harry laughed and agreed to consider it.

Upon leaving Dewrwas', the teen headed to Gringotts. He moved to the first available teller, and inclined his head after reading the name plate. "Greetings Teller Axebender. I would like to open a vault, beginning with this transfer of funds. I would like to deposit all but one hundred and fifty galleons, and will take that as one hundred galleons and the rest converted into Muggle pounds." Once the paperwork was completed, he leaned forward and added in an undertone, "Dewrwas has a new supply of basilisk skin if any goblin armorers are interested." He picked up the vault key, and nodded once to the Teller who was looking at him with surprised eyes. "May your gold overflow and your enemies have short lives."

Once outside of Gringotts, he turned right and passed several shops until he reached Ollivanders. The shop looked just as it did when he bought his holly wand back when he was a starry-eyed eleven year old. Peeling gold letters over the door of the shop display the name; Ollivanders: Makers of Fine Wands since 382 B.C. The shop's dusty window display consisted of a solitary wand lying on a faded purple cushion. He entered and a bell chimed in the tiny shop, which

appeared empty except for a single, spindly chair in the corner. Thousands of narrow boxes containing wands were piled right up to the ceiling of the tiny shop, and the whole place seemed to have a thin layer of dust about it.

Even though Harry was looking for the man, he still jumped when his reedy voice whispered, "Welcome. Hmm, not quite who I was expecting to see today. By what name should I call you?" The old man's eeriness was something Harry hadn't missed. Ollivander had wide pale eyes that rarely blinked and he had the ability to see and say things that made Harry a little uncomfortable.

Harry tried not to react to the odd wording. "Harrison Black. My wand was stolen and broken, so I need a replacement." He tried to smile disarmingly and added, "I've been told that I'm a difficult customer. I hope you have something that will match me."

The pale blue eyes examined him closely and then he said with a smile and a shake of his head, "Come now, we both know the wand that matches you." He turned and headed off down one of the narrow dusty aisles, ignoring Harry's widened eyes. He returned quickly with a slender narrow box. When the elderly man opened it, Harry was somehow unsurprised to realize it contained a very familiar sight.

"I believe this is what you came in to find," said Ollivander as he presented the open box.

Harry stared at the holly wand and nodded slowly. He reached out with a shaking hand and as it came closer to the wand, it began to hum. The wand itself was humming! It almost leapt into his hand and his hand shook as he tried to control the magic vibrating inside him. Without warning, a golden ball of energy exploded from the wand, clothing the entire store in golden light that began to shimmer and change colors. A rainbow of colors cycled through the room, growing in intensity until both Harry and the wand maker had to close their eyes. Wave after wave of magic rushed through the room, causing their skin to tingle and their hair to dance in the invisible breeze.

When the light finally lessened, both Harry and Ollivander looked around the shop in surprise. What had been an ancient, dusty and well-worn shop appeared pristine and new. The dark-haired young man stared at the wand in awe and confusion, while a grin began to

tug at the corners of his mouth. "Well, that was...interesting," he finally managed.

"I think we can expect great things of you, Mr. Black, great things indeed," responded Ollivander. "That will be seven galleons." Harry paid quickly; glad to leave the man's unsettling presence.

Upon leaving Ollivander's, Harry stopped at "Baggage for all Occasions". Even though he had been granted guest quarters at Hogwarts, he wanted a trunk to store his belongings in case he had to move. He heard a faint ringing as he opened the door and looked around for the shop keeper.

"Afternoon, young man," he heard as an old man with wispy white hair approached. "What kind of luggage are you looking for today?"

Harry inclined his head politely, "I'm looking for something to hold my belongings when I need to move."

"Ah" the old man smiled with understanding, "a recent graduate from Hogwarts and want something a little more mature than your old school trunk?"

"Something like that" Harry agreed with a smile.

"I'm Adrian Hessler, the shop owner. Take a look around, and if you don't see anything you like, we can discuss a custom trunk. The ones on the right wall are the standard school trunks. Further back are the multi-compartment trunks. On the left are the featherlight backpacks and bags. If you find something you like that's already in stock, we can discuss adding additional charms. I typically include a featherlight charm and a shrinking and enlarging charm as standard accessories."

"I think I want a multi-compartment trunk; one compartment to hold clothing, one to hold books, and a third to hold potion equipment."

Mr. Hessler nodded and started walking to the back. "I have a nice selection of those. Do you want the compartments for storage only, or with expanded space to use them as rooms?"

Harry thought about it. "I have no need of a walk-in closet or library, but I can see the advantage of having a potion room available no

matter where I'm at. How much for one room-sized potion compartment with the standard featherlight plus the shrinking and enlarging charm?"

Hessler ran a hand over his wispy hair as he thought. "Well, it depends on the materials. If you want rare woods, metals and engravings, it will cost more. If you take a trunk I already have made, it will cost less." He walked over to several trunks that were arranged on the floor. "Now here's a nice mahogany chest with brass hardware and dragon hide straps. Two compartments are expanded storage only, while the third is expanded into an 8 foot by 10 foot room. This one will run 55 galleons, because the design is rather plain without a lot of engraving or metalwork, which the older families prefer. Each space is opened by rotating this rune on the trunk lock."

Harry opened each compartment and grinned at the shop keeper. "Sold!" he said, pleased with the purchase. Being plain was fine with him; it meant it gathered less attention. He walked out of the shop with his new purchase shrunk and fitting easily in his pocket.

He returned to Madam Malkin's and smiled at the short woman as she bustled back out. "Welcome back, Mr..." she paused as she realized she didn't know her customer's name.

"Harrison Black at your service, Madame Malkin," he said with a small bow. "I'm back for a new wardrobe."

"Welcome back, Mr. Black," she said with a smile. "Please step up on one of the platforms and we'll begin gathering your measurements." He stepped up on one of the two-foot square platforms and allowed the tape measure to roam over him.

"What type of wardrobe do you need," she asked. "What type of materials should I bring out for your inspection?"

"I'm looking for at least five changes of daily clothing. I thought several pairs of black, gray and perhaps navy trousers with five different button-down shirts."

"I have a nice wool for winter, but you'll want something else like a twill for summer. And perhaps a blend of broadcloth and silk in jewel

tones for the shirts?" Madame Malkin bustled around pulling out materials for Harry's inspection.

"I didn't even think about the changing seasons," he admitted. "So two different wardrobes, and I'll trust your judgment on the fabrics. I'll also need three every day robes, at least a medium quality and a couple of nice formal robes, as well as a summer and winter cloak." He pressed an impression of his new vault key on the order form and had her promise to have all the clothing delivered within three days.

Upon leaving Madame Malkin's with the woman mumbling happily about matching fabrics, threads and buttons, Harry headed next door to Flourish and Blotts. With the clerk's help, he picked up study guides for both OWLs and NEWTs. He also picked up "Great Wizards of the Twentieth Century" and "Notable Magical Names of our Time" to give himself a better view of recent history in this world.

With his books stored in his trunk and that shrunk and back in his pocket, he left the bookstore. Scribulus Everchanging Inks was conveniently next door, so he made a quick stop to pick up stationary and parchment, although he planned for the majority of his writing to be on Muggle paper.

Eeylops Owl Emporium was across the street from the stationary store, and Harry remembered that he wanted treats for any owls that delivered mail. He entered the store and looked at perches with two cups; one for treats and one for water. As he looked over the perches, a white figure flew down from near the ceiling and landed on his shoulder. He looked at the snowy white owl and stumbled in shock. "Hedwig? Is that you," Harry gasped. The owl clacked her beak and nibbled his ear before beginning to preen his hair. "Oh sweet Merlin, I never thought I would see you again, Hedwig," he whispered as his eyes filled with tears.

"Well I'll be jiggered," the store owner said staring at the owl in amazement. "Nine years she's come and gone from this shop. Nine years she's refused every single person who wanted to buy her. Apparently she was waiting for you, young man." He shook his head again, "I never thought I would see the day..."

Harry nodded absently and concentrated on scratching the lovely owl behind her neck and under her wings, just as he remembered

she liked it. Finally, to the shop keeper's amusement, he asked her to pick out a perch she liked. She immediately flew to a good-sized perch that could easily accommodate two large birds. She turned her back on Harry when he asked if she wanted a cage, so he chuckled and ignored those. He bought a large supply of treats and two cups for the perch. He enlarged the trunk, placed everything inside and then shrunk it again and finally left the shop keeper still shaking his head at the bird finally choosing her owner.

Once they left the store, he said, "I'm living at Hogwarts, Hedwig. Would you like to fly there? I still have more shopping to do." She chewed on his fingers gently, and then launched herself into the sky. Harry couldn't help but watch her fly away until she became too small to see.

Pottage's Cauldron Shop was his next stop. He picked up medium sized brass, copper and pewter cauldrons and stirring rods made in a variety of materials. He packed those into his trunk and headed to Slug & Jiggers Apothecary. He picked up the ingredients for healing potions, blood replenishment, skele-gro, burn paste, calming draught, sleeping draught and dreamless sleep potions. He also noticed a bin of Floo powder and scooped up a large amount of that as well.

When he dropped everything on the counter, the clerk looked at him with surprise. "Now that's an interesting assortment."

Harry chuckled disarmingly. "I'm going to need to prove my worth to Professor Snape at Hogwarts," he said in explanation.

"Ah, say no more," the clerk smirked and began totaling his purchases.

"Tell me," Harry asked, "Do you ever carry basilisk venom?"

The clerk's eyes widened and he rubbed his chin considering. "Heh, now that's a rare item, that is. Costs a good one hundred galleons for a single dram, and we don't see much of it."

Harry quickly converted that in his mind to one dram being one-eighth of an ounce. "So eight hundred galleons per ounce?" At the clerk's agreement, Harry added a dozen impervious flasks to his purchases, as another idea percolated in his mind.

With everything purchased and loaded into his trunk, Harry finally left Diagon Alley. He stopped at the Leaky Cauldron and ordered dinner, as he needed to rest his aching joints and bones before visiting Muggle London. After a good meat pie and a butterbeer, he headed out to Muggle London. He hailed a taxi and had it take him to Harrod's, the one department store he remembered his Aunt Petunia speaking of with approval.

Once there, he bought underclothing, socks, dress shoes, trainers, and a long leather trench coat. He found their stationary area, and bought a variety of notebooks and several steel-tipped fountain pens. He was fading quickly after that, and from a stall in the men's room, he apparated back to the Leaky Cauldron, and with a polite nod to Tom, he paid a sickle for Floo powder and Floo'd back to "Harrison Black's Quarters, Hogwarts".

Harry was delighted to find Hedwig tapping at the window in his bedroom when he arrived at his quarters. He opened the window for her, and she immediately perched on his shoulder, and nibbled at his hair. He enlarged his new trunk, and quickly set up the perch with treats and water. However, she chose to stay with him when he sat in front of the fireplace. She settled on his knee and he scratched the back of her neck as her eyes closed in contentment.

The flickering firelight cast odd shadows on Harry as sat near the hearth, drinking his tea after another night of terrorizing dreams. A soft pop announced the presence of a house elf. He turned and smiled at seeing Nebby. "Good morning, Nebby. What brings you here so early?"

The small figure looked at him with wide eyes. "What is Master Harry doing awake? The master should be sleeping! And..you is making your own tea?" She shook her head as if ashamed. "Would Master Harry like Nebby to bring some breakfast?"

"Breakfast sounds good, Nebby. Thank you." He flinched as her eyes shone brightly from his gratitude.

"Oh! Nebby almost forgot!" She handed him a folded parchment. "Master Potions Master Snape sir sent this to you. I will be back with a good breakfast for the Master." She disappeared with another small pop.

Harry shook his head in amusement at the house elf's honorifics for the Potions Master and then turned his attention to the parchment. He broke the wax seal and opened it to find a small note.

Mr. Black,

In order to confirm your competency at NEWT level potions, please come to my office at 10:00 this morning. We will review your understanding of ingredient preparation and interactions before adjourning to the Lab to review your brewing proficiency.

Potions Master Severus Snape

"How do I get used to a courteous Snape," he chuckled. "Poor Neville would have been dismayed to receive such a note, wondering what the hidden message or trick was!"

After his morning meeting with Healer MacMillian, at which the two agreed to meet daily for another week and then re-evaluate, Harry headed down to the dungeons to see Professor Snape with his Potion equipment in a bag slung over his shoulder. He found the door open with a clear view of the taciturn Potions Master sitting at his desk writing on what appeared to be a lesson plan. He knocked on the open door politely, which caused Snape to nod approving, "Right on time, Mr. Black. Please, take a seat."

Harry sat in one of the hard straight-back chairs in front of the desk and leaned his cane against the other.

"Mr. Black, let's start with a review of ingredient preparation. What is the difference between slicing and dicing an ingredient?" That question started an intense hour long review of every way an ingredient could be prepared, followed by the interaction between two dozen of the most commonly used components.

To Harry's immense surprise, the Potions Master said, "Satisfactory, Mr. Black," at the end of the interrogation. He had never earned a "satisfactory" from the Snape in his world!

Snape stood up from his desk and indicated the hallway with one black-clad arm. "If you are up for it, let's adjourn to the lab and work on several potions." When Harry took his cane and walked to the

door, he was surprised again when the Potions Master asked, "Will you need a stool during the brewing? I realize you are still recovering from your injuries."

"I'll try standing for the brewing process, Professor. I prefer to work as we normally would in class, but thank you for asking."

They reached the Potions lab and Harry was surprised to see three cauldrons set up. The Potions Master said, "We will try several potions from the Sixth Year curriculum. You are allowed reference materials during the brewing process. The Sixth Year text book does have the recipes if you need them. I want you to prepare the Blood Replenishment, Dreamless Sleep and another potion of your choice. Ingredients are in the cupboard in back and you may use the extra equipment in the back."

Harry grinned at the Professor. "Thank you, you've given me two of the potions I can create without messing up simply due to how often I made them. I also brought my own tools."

The Potions Master arched an eyebrow, "Indeed, Mr. Black. What other potions are you familiar with due to repetition?"

"The Pepper-Up potion, all three standard Healing potions, Blood Replenishment, Skele-Gro, burn salve, calming draught, the standard sleeping draught, and the Dreamless Sleep potion." Harry didn't mention that it took innumerable trial and error sessions before he was proficient in those few potions and that he knew them out of necessity.

Harry took out his knives and the mortar and pestle, pleased when Snape nodded approvingly at the upgraded knife set he had purchased. The Dreamless Sleep would take longest, as it needed to steep for twelve hours after reaching a boil, while the Blood Replenishment would be completed within two hours. He decided on the Burn Salve as his third sample. He ran through all the ingredients in his mind and then proceeded to the supply cupboard.

He started preparing ingredients as Snape went to his desk with his lesson plans again. "Will you want me to come back when the Dreamless Sleep is done steeping, Professor?"

"I will judge the progress once you set it aside. If everything looks good then, I will take care of it after the steeping process is completed."

"Yes sir, thank you," Harry responded, glad he wasn't going to have to come down around midnight to complete the potion.

Two hours and thirty minutes later, Snape pronounced the Blood Replenishment and Burn Salve acceptable for use in the Infirmary, and approved the status of the Dreamless Sleep. "You may sit in any of my NEWT classes, Mr. Black. I will give you the syllabus of what we will prepare when so that you may select which classes to attend."

Severus made a point to sit next to the Headmaster at the evening meal. "I had Mr. Black come down and prepare three potions today," he said quietly to the Headmaster. Professors McGonagall and Black looked up with interest and eavesdropped unashamedly.

"How did our guest fare, Severus?" the elderly wizard asked looking over his glasses with a smile.

"I found that 'our guest' has an interesting repertoire of potions that he is able to brew without errors. I suspect his expertise grew through necessity."

Dumbledore raised an eyebrow and waited for additional information from the reticent Potions Master. "He seems experienced with the majority of items I brew for the Infirmary. It made me wonder what he was doing before he was captured in his world that required he be able to brew all of his own healing and sleeping potions, as well as Dreamless Sleep."

Albus frowned at the younger man. "Dreamless Sleep? I do hope he understood the highly addictive properties in that potion. But based on his condition when he arrived, it is not surprising that he suffers from terrible nightmares."

Sirius Black leaned forward to pour another cup of coffee. "I think it's time that I met our young guest," he stated. "Not only is he considering a Mastery in Defense, but he bears my name. I believe it's time to evaluate his offensive and defensive magic, and maybe learn a few things about him." He clasped both hands around his

coffee cup and sipped it slowly, different scenarios running through his mind.

The tall man with collar-length black hair spotted a young man walking down the hallway with a cane, and hurried to catch up with him. Harry heard the swift footsteps behind him and half-turned, stunned to see the image of his godfather striding towards him.

"Hello, you're Harrison Black? I'm Sirius Black." He grinned disarmingly at the young man and held out a hand. "So tell the truth, are we related?"

"Related?" Harry gulped. Now what? He didn't want to lie to Sirius, but he certainly wasn't going to say 'only in as much as you're my god-father and made me your heir'. He hesitantly reached for the outstretched hand and pumped it twice, releasing it quickly afterwards. 'This is not my Sirius', he had to remind himself when all he wanted to do was crush the man in a rib-cracking hug. "The Headmaster asked me that as well. However, Black is a pretty common name in the Muggle world." He immediately tried to change the subject. "I understand that you're the Defense teacher."

Sirius nodded and adjusted his pace to the teen's still limping pace. "I was an Auror, but a curse left my leg too ineffective to chase after the bad guys properly. Albus offered me the DADA position six years ago, and I've been here ever since."

Harry blinked and made an effort to keep his face neutral. So there was no curse on the position then, unlike his world.

Sirius nudged the teen, "So, am I famous in your world? Well-known for my exceptional good looks and luck with the ladies?"

Harry glanced up at the man from under dark lashes. This Sirius didn't have the gaunt and haunted look his godfather had, and his eyes sparkled with humor. He had to admit that the older man was good-looking in an aristocratic way, and bore himself with a casual elegance. He grinned, "Is that what you're known for here? What ladies have drawn your attention? Professor McGonagall? Madame Pomfrey?"

A sharp bark of laughter from Sirius made Harry's heart clutch with longing for his lost godfather.

"Ah yes, Minerva and Poppy will always be among my first loves and most treasured memories," the older man said through gasps of laughter, not noticing the younger man's reaction.

He stopped laughing as he realized Harry was heading towards the stairs. "Are you busy, Mr. Black?"

Harry paused and turned back to his godfather's counterpart. "Please, call me Harry," he said with a smile. "It's a little confusing to have Mr. Black calling me Mr. Black."

Sirius grinned and replied, "As long as you call me Sirius, you have a deal. I'm much too young and good looking to be Mister Black. It's hard enough being Professor Black to the young ones. And speaking of being a Professor, I heard you might be interested in auditing some of the NEWT level classes."

The younger teen nodded and inclined his head towards the stair case. "I was just going to find a room to practice some of my spells. I'm not sure how my reflexes will be as I'm still recovering from my injuries." He didn't mention that he was headed for the Room of Requirement, as he wasn't sure whether this Sirius knew of it or not.

"You're welcome to use my classroom, Harry. We just received a couple of Auror practice dummies this year. They can be set to any level, First Year through Master's level, and my classroom is fully warded against damage."

Harry hesitated, not sure how long he could remain neutral with this world's Sirius Black. The other man misread his hesitation and added, "It would be a good way to gradually work your way back up to NEWT level work. You can find out what weaknesses you have and develop counters to them." He grinned at the younger man. "Come on, don't force me to work on..." he shuddered visibly "...lesson plans!"

He couldn't contain the snort of amusement, "OK Sirius, you win. Merlin forbid I reduce you to actually working. Lead on, then."

As the two walked towards the DADA classroom, Sirius couldn't help but speculate about the young stranger. He seemed to be restrained for some reason, and he wasn't quite sure he believed him that they

were unknown to each other in his world. The next hour or two should prove very interesting.

OoOoOoOo

Chapter 6 – Two Steps Forward, One Step Back

The DADA Professor led the younger man to the specially warded training room that had been upgraded to include Auror level practice dummies a year ago. Sirius had fought on behalf of the funding and DMLE approval for the dummies for several years before finally receiving approval the prior year.

"These are Auror level practice dummies, Harry. I would wager you'll find yourself both loving and hating them after a while. They can be set to any level, from First Year to Seventh Year, and can cast both offensive and defensive spells. In addition to the Year, they also have three levels of difficulty. At the lowest level, they are stationary and help the student practice precision casting and channeling. At the higher levels, they move and even apparate around the room, offering near battle-conditions.

Harry looked at the vaguely humanoid shapes with surprise and respect. This looked like an excellent way to slowly rebuild his casting abilities. Preston had strongly encouraged him to avoid situations where spells were actively cast at him for the time being, until they worked through more of the aftermath of his imprisonment, but practicing channeling and targeting sounded good to the teen.

"Since I'm still recovering from the nerve damage, I think targeting practice would be a great idea," Harry agreed. "At least I can hold a cup without sloshing the contents out of it now."

Sirius felt uncomfortable at the reminder of all the teen had endured. He genuinely questioned whether Harrison Black was related to the Sirius Black of the boy's home world or whether it was a coincidence. While the teen had dark hair, he didn't have the same height or build that Sirius did, but he could take after his mother. The older man hoped to use some of their time today to learn more about the teen.

Harry permitted Sirius to set the practice dummies at Third Year level. He practiced his targeting with Expelliarmus, and the dummy flashed with each successful hit on the "wand" target. After several minutes of targeting, he moved to channeling while Sirius leaned against the wall of the classroom and watched.

"Deprimo" he cast quietly, targeting the dummy on the far left. A wind hit the target, rocking it slightly. He concentrated on channeling more magic through his wand. "Deprimo," he cast again. The wind knocked the practice dummy over.

"Hm, perhaps something easier to evaluate," he muttered. Sirius looked interested, but stayed quiet. "Excelsiosempra" he cast at the dummy on the right. The dummy rose a foot into the air. He concentrated on the strength of the spell he wanted and tried again. "Excelsiosempra!" The dummy rose to the ceiling and Harry gave a slight smile of satisfaction. "Accio practice dummy," he called to counter the floating effect, concentrating on where he wanted the dummy to drop. It returned to its' position, although a foot closer than it had been.

At his request, Sirius changed the level to Fourth Year and the highest difficulty, causing the dummies to move and dodge as he cast. He repeated all of his spells, focusing hard and at the end of thirty minutes, he was pleased with his progress and what it indicated for the future.

"Nicely done, Harry" Sirius said from behind him. "It looks like it won't take you very long to perfect your targeting and channeling. Why don't we try a Third or Fourth level duel, so that you can practice shielding and counters?"

Harry stiffened slightly and began to shake his head. "I don't think so Professor. I'm not quite sure I'm ready."

Sirius grinned at him as he drew his wand. "You're doing great! And if you want to attend my NEWT level classes, I need to evaluate both your offensive and defensive abilities. We'll have a nice and simple duel; we can even limit it to Fourth Level spells."

At Harry's continued hesitation, he added cajolingly, "Come on, how often do you get a free shot at a teacher? Let's see if you can knock me down."

The teen grinned, forgetting momentarily this wasn't really his godfather. "OK, you're on. Prepare for your arse to become intimately acquainted with the floor!"

They bowed, and Harry cast a quick disillusion and moved quietly to his left. Sirius began an Expelliarmus, but quickly changed to Homenum Revelio when Harry disappeared. Harry cast "Excelsiosempra", but Sirius dodged, casting his own Petrificus Totalus which the younger man dodged. As he moved, Harry cast Expelliarmus which hit Sirius, and his wand flew towards Harry. Sirius tried a wandless "Accio my wand", but Harry moved and it failed.

Harry held up the wand and smirked at the clone of his godfather. "Now if only I had a camera, the Professor beaten by a recovering patient!"

"Bah!" the older man said with a good-natured grin. "I demand a rematch!"

They took their places again, and after a quick bow the spells began again. Sirius immediately tried a Confundo, which Harry dodged, while Harry tried an Expelliarmus, which Sirius avoided. Both of them darted and moved quickly as the spells flew.

Sirius used a low level "Furnunculus" which the younger man evaded. "Geminio!" Harry cast at himself, creating a duplicate. However, he didn't channel enough energy to make more than one, and Sirius kept the right image targeted.

"Stupefy!" tried the older man, admiring the speed with which the younger man moved, even though he was recovering from serious injuries.

Harry tried a quick "Incarcerous!", but Sirius ducked and it went over his head. He was already casting a "Silencio!" casting slightly to the teen's right, and grinned as he moved into it, dodging the wrong way.

Harry tried a nonverbal Protego and was delighted when it worked. Sirius' Tarantallegra bounced off the shield, leaving it up, but weakened.

Harry tried a nonverbal Finite and gave a breath of relief as he regained his voice.

Eager to see how the teen reacted to a higher level spell, Sirius shouted, "Reducto!" The spell flew at the teen, who stopped in

shock and his whole body froze. The spell broke through the weakened shield and struck Harry's shoulder, causing a small geyser of blood to erupt. To Sirius' shock, the teen fell to the floor and curled his body into a fetal position, even though he ignored the actual injury.

"Oh sweet Merlin," Sirius groaned as he saw the blood and the slightly shuddering figure on the floor. He quickly cast a Protonus charm and sent it for Madam Pomfrey with brief details and a plea for her to hurry. He conjured a handkerchief and dropped down to the floor next to the teen. "I'm sorry, Harry" he said as he tried to press the handkerchief against the wound. The teen flinched from his touch, but otherwise didn't acknowledge him.

The minutes until Madame Pomfrey arrived seemed interminable to Sirius. He didn't understand why the teen had frozen or why he was huddled and unresponsive on the floor. Finally, the Matron arrived. "Explain," she snapped even as she cast a diagnostic charm.

"We were dueling, and I cast Reducto to see how he handled a more dangerous spell. He just froze and it broke through his shield and hit his shoulder. He then dropped to the floor and he hasn't responded to anything since." He paused as she gently moved the teen onto his back and healed the wound.

"Isn't it bad enough that the students injure one another? Must the teachers get into the act now as well?" she muttered. She levitated the teen and headed to Sirius' office.

"What happened to him, Poppy," demanded Sirius. "Why won't he respond to anything?"

"Do you know what this poor boy went through before he arrived, Professor Black?" Sirius flinched when she didn't address him by his given name as well as the iciness in her voice. "He was a prisoner and tortured on a daily basis. How do you think you would react to one of the spells used to regularly torture you?"

She threw some Floo powder into the fireplace and called out "Infirmary, Hogwarts" and walked through, carrying the younger Black with her.

Preston MacMillian responded quickly to the urgent Floo from Poppy Pomfrey. "I'm not sure of everything that happened, Preston," she said as they walked to the bed where Harry lay curled into a ball, shivering slightly. "Apparently he was dueling with the DADA Professor and was hit with a Reducto."

Preston hid his irritation and turned to the teen. After several minutes with no response to any stimulus, he turned back to Poppy. "I need to speak with the DADA professor. I need to fully understand what happened."

Sirius felt like a recalcitrant student when he was summoned to the Infirmary. He was horrified that the young man was still unresponsive. "Professor Black, this is Healer Preston MacMillian," introduced Poppy.

"I need to understand everything that happened today, Professor Black," stated Preston. "I cleared Mr. Black to work on casting, but not defensively. He just wanted to begin exercising his magic."

"Well, I've been looking forward to meeting him, especially since we have the same name. I saw him in the hall, and we chatted for a few minutes. He said he was going to practice, so I invited him to use the DADA practice dummies. He mostly practiced targeting, but also did some channeling. He was doing pretty well, so I suggested that we duel."

Sirius suddenly remembered the conversation and closed his eyes in embarrassment. "He declined at first, but I pushed him by saying that I needed to evaluate him if he wanted to attend my NEWT level classes. Then I was just joking with him, and he suddenly grinned and said OK." He took a deep breath and looked at the Healer. "The first duel was pretty quick, no more than half a dozen spells and he disarmed me. We started again, and I was pretty impressed. I totally forgot where he had been before he arrived here; I totally forgot that he had been tortured." He looked at the Healer with haunted eyes and added, "Everything was OK until I cast a Reducto, then he froze and collapsed and has been like this ever since."

Preston held his temper through years of practice and only said mildly, "While in captivity, they regularly cast Reducto, Diffindo, Confringo and bone-breaking curses on him in addition to the Cruciatus curse. When you cast a Reducto at him, I can only

assume that he flashed back to his imprisonment, when he was being tortured." He thought for a moment and added, "I will talk with Harry, and with his approval, I will address the staff at some point today. This situation cannot re-occur unless you want to completely destroy any chance of recovery this young man has." He ignored the guilt flooding the DADA Professor's face.

Preston returned to the bed and gently took the young man's face in his hands. "Harry, can you hear me? Can you stand up?" After only shudders and no other visible response, Preston turned to the other two. "We're going to need privacy here." Poppy immediately cast a spell towards one wall, and several privacy screens instantly moved to surround the bed. Sirius wanted to protest at not being able to see the young man he had injured, but at a hard nudge from Poppy, he reluctantly left, carrying his guilt with him.

Preston said calmly to his patient, "This is Preston MacMillian, Harry. You know me. You are in the Infirmary at Hogwarts." There was no response, causing Preston to bite back a sigh at the convalescent's condition. He would deal with the cause of this situation later, once Harry was stable. Instead, he focused on telling the young man everything he was going to do. "I'm going to sit down beside you on your bed, Harry." He sat, but there was no response from the traumatized man. He talked calmly and steadily for several minutes with no reaction from his patient.

Finally, he leaned forward and said "I'm going to touch your face, Harry," and then held the teen's head gently yet firmly. "Harry, I'm going to cast Legilimens so that I can see what you're seeing and help you return."

He stared in to the unseeing green eyes and cast quietly, "Legilimens".

He hung from the manacles that bound his wrists, a trickle of blood running down his arm, his shoulders burning with the strain of his weight. Lucius Malfoy strode into the room and Harry just looked at him with tired red-rimmed eyes.

"How are you feeling, Potter," the blonde asked as though sincerely concerned.

Harry thrust his legs under him and forced himself to stand rather than hang. "So nice to see you Lucius. How delightful to see you. Come to share a cuppa with me?"

"You are a foolish little boy trying to play in a man's world," Malfoy sneered at him. "Do you realize where you are? The Dark Lord's mansion is unknown and untraceable. There are apparition and port key wards in place, but more than that, no one knows where you are. We have days, weeks, months and even years to enjoy our time together." He smiled cruelly, "well, at least some of us will be enjoying it. You however, will soon beg for your death."

He snapped his fingers and two masked death eaters entered the room. He recognized Peter Pettigrew through the small man's furtive movements and nervous laughter. He assumed the other one was either the senior Crabbe or Goyle, as he was large and moved awkwardly. "Start with the fingers and then each of the toes," smirked Malfoy. "Break the bones first and then dislocate each knuckle."

Harry held out as long as he could, and even when a sound came, it barely escaped through tightly clenched jaws and lips pressed together with determination. He thought he might have cracked some of the teeth clenching them so tightly. He held out until they dislocated his knees, then the screams of agony eventually erupted out of him and echoed throughout the dungeon. Lucius Malfoy's lips turned upwards in amusement and satisfaction at the scream of anguish.

As the memory began to replay again, a voice could be heard. "This is only a memory, Harry. This is not real. You are at Hogwarts. You are not a prisoner. Professor Black is horrified that his spell hurt you. This is only a memory. It is in the past. Look at me, Harry. Come back to me." The voice repeated calmly and patiently over and over reassuring him until Harry slowly returned his awareness to the world around him.

"Welcome back, Harry," Preston said with warm approval in his voice. "I'm pleased that you were able to listen to me and come out of that memory. Well done."

Harry looked around him and after a few moments realized he was in the Infirmary. He turned his haunted and almost unseeing eyes

towards Preston as he drew a shuddering breath. "Well done? I'm a basket case, Preston. I shouldn't be allowed out with normal people."

Preston shook his head and leaned forward, "You are perfectly normal, Harry. Your responses are completely normal as well. Your captors were the deviants; their brutal behaviors were abnormal. Your response and recovery is characteristic of anyone who has suffered as much trauma as you have."

"Do you know that out of everything they did, the physical torture wasn't even the worst," Harry said in a monotone voice. "It was what they did to me...to who I was."

He paused and Preston realized his eyes were not seeing anything in this room. After several minutes of silence, he finally asked gently, "Can you tell me what they did to who you were?"

Harry slowly returned to the room he was in and dispassionately, "Tom and his Death Eaters tortured me physically, but they also made sure that I realized I was nothing in their eyes. If they weren't talking about what they were going to do or actually torturing me, they kept up a steady dialogue of what a worthless, powerless piece of rubbish I was. How I wasn't worth the air I breathed, but that I wasn't worth the energy of an Avada Kedavra."

He took a deep and shuddering breath, "After most of their 'sessions', I would be on the ground, laying in my own filth and blood, trying to stop the cries of agony. They constantly told me how I was less than a wizard, how I was lower than vermin. I was a only a thing; their thing and they were free to torment me any way they wanted for any reason; amusement, boredom, even a simple habit." He stopped and swallowed heavily, and then shook his head, unable to continue.

Preston said softly, "They dehumanized you, because they knew it would hurt you." He gathered a blanket from the foot of the bed and wrapped it around Harry's trembling body. "And in spite of yourself, you may have come to believe it because you had no hope and no power. In that situation, it would be nearly impossible for anyone to keep their self-worth." His voice took on a deeper and more commanding tone. "Harry, any normal person would lose heart and

fall into the dark hole of despair. Any normal person would hope for the death that they took pleasure in denying you."

The green eyes flickered up to him and then back down to the hands that were tightly clenched in his lap. Preston continued, "Harry, your reactions are normal and reasonable. Even though the physical torture ended, any normal person would live in with fear in their back pocket. Any normal person would be mistrustful of other people, and flinch away from being touched. I may never be able to understand the horror you experienced, but I can promise you one thing. We will work through it. I won't lie to you. There will be good days and there will be dark days. Our goal will be to work on making sure that there are more good days, the days when you have faith and hope and trust again."

Harry wasn't seen for the rest of the day, using the Infirmary Floo to return to his quarters. Sirius Black reported to Albus what had happened and how the teen had been driven almost catatonic from a Reducto. While Albus didn't absolve him of any blame, he did suggest that he work with Healer MacMillian to determine what he could do to help with Harry's recovery. After leaving Harry, Preston spoke with the Headmaster, who then assembled the entire staff.

"Most of you are aware that Harrison Black is a guest of the school for the time being. He is also under my care for the many traumatic events he endured." The Healer looked around the staff room with a stern eye. "I want to reiterate that Mr. Black is not to be subjected to any physical or magical attacks without my approval, and probably my presence. He is not a danger to any of the students or staff, but if attacked, his recovery will be significantly impacted. I am asking for your assistance to make sure that doesn't happen." With their assurances, he left.

The next morning, Harry awoke screaming from another nightmare, although this time it started from his early childhood, where his Uncle Vernon called him a freak and a waste of space, and then locked him in his cupboard. He pounded on it, trying to get out, but was told that freaks like him didn't deserve to be in the presence of normal people. The cupboard slowly dissolved into the cell Voldemort had kept him in, and his captors repeated that he was less than nothing, unworthy of the air he breathed, and that he deserved the discipline they needed to provide.

Preston arrived for their morning appointment and after accepting a cup of tea, he asked, "What was last night's nightmare about?"

Harry shrugged and avoided the other man's eyes. Hedwig flew to his shoulder and nibbled his hair. The teen stroked the bird's white feathers gently, calming somewhat with the familiar motion.

"Harry," began Preston, "we're in a partnership. It's you and me working together. I will help you get through anything, no matter what. I don't judge you, but I will listen. Anything you say to me is confidential."

The teen ran his hand through his hair, as he debated talking to Preston. Finally, he took a deep breath, "Everything is confidential, no matter what?"

"Of course, Harry. I gave you my oath." The older man waited patiently as his patient fidgeted a little.

"You haven't asked me why I dueled Professor Black when you encouraged me to only practice targeting."

"Do you want to tell me about it?"

Harry ran his hands through his hair and then tugged it fiercely, while Preston waited patiently. "It's because I forgot he wasn't really my godfather." He looked at Preston and said, "I told him I was only practicing targeting and channeling, but he began joking with me and suddenly I forgot where I was. I only recognized that it was my godfather teasing me and I wanted to knock him on his arse as a prank." He smiled at the memory of the feeling of being teased.

"So where you're from, Professor Black is your godfather?" Preston clarified.

The smile left the teen's face. "Actually, he's dead in my world. Almost everyone here is dead; Dumbledore, Snape, Poppy, a good number of the students. It was a terrible war. Your Lord Slytherin called himself Lord Voldemort in my world. He wasn't exactly sane and rather than political maneuverings, he was pretty much a terrorist, working through fear and violence." Hedwig crooned at him softly and hopped down to his lap, tugging at his fingers until he stroked her again.

After a few moments, Harry made a decision, took a deep breath and looked at the older man. "It started before my birth. Voldemort was rising in power and violence. My parents refused to give in to him. There was a prophecy that made him think I might be able to defeat him. My parents were under a Fidelius, but they trusted the wrong secret keeper and he brought Voldemort right to them when I was only fifteen months old. He killed my parents, but when he cast the killing curse at me, it rebounded back at him; I always assumed it was something my mother had done. Because I actually survived the killing curse, the press named me "the boy-who-lived"." Preston noticed that his voice dripped with distaste for the title.

"The Headmaster had Hagrid take me from the ruins of my parent's home while Sirius took off after the traitor. I was supposed to grow up with him, with Sirius, but Dumbledore decided to use my mother's sacrifice to create blood wards around her sister's house. Unfortunately, she was a Muggle who hated everything magic, including me." He looked at Preston and then away again before dropping his eyes to his hands. "My 'room' was a cupboard under the stairs until my Hogwarts letter came, then they moved me to their son's second bedroom. They used to call me an ungrateful brat, a freak, and a waste of space. They told me my parents were unemployed drunks that died in a car accident. I had a nightmare about that this morning that became all mixed up with Voldemort's tortures."

Preston nodded, but his mind was swirling in multiple directions. Not only did his torturers dehumanize the boy, but his own relatives did as well, and from a very early age. He was treated like a pair of boots, kept out of sight, called a waste of space? It was a wonder the young man was able to function as well as he did.

"You said that you were supposed to live with your godfather. Why didn't that happen?" Preston asked.

"He chased after the traitor who made it appear that Sirius was the Secret Keeper. He cast a blasting curse that hit a Muggle gas line and killed a dozen muggles, then changed into his rat animagus form and fled down a sewer. Sirius was put in Azkaban as a mass murderer without even a trial." Harry frowned at the memory of the gaunt and haunted Sirius he first met. "He was there for twelve years and came out barely sane."

"Since you have the same surname, can I assume you were related," Preston questioned.

"Um, actually, my name isn't really Harrison Black, although I'm legally entitled to use Black because Sirius made me his heir and Head of the Black Family. But I was born..." he looked quickly at Preston and away again, "Harry James Potter."

More revelations burst upon the Mind Healer. "Are the parents of the twins who helped summon you your parents?"

Harry shook his head adamantly, "No, my parents died Halloween night in 1981. The Lily and James Potter here lost their son and friend that same night. Knowing me won't tell them how their son might have turned out. Knowing them only gives me a reflection of who my parents were."

"So why did you choose an alias then? Why are you known as Harrison Black?"

Harry messed up his hair some more before replying. "I wasn't sure the people I was talking to weren't Death Eaters, Voldemort's followers trying to trick me into something, maybe give me false hope before jerking it away. If they were Death Eaters, they would have reacted to a different name. So I tried it to see. When they didn't react, I figured I was hallucinating. The idea of a parallel world still seems like it came out of someone's too vivid imagination."

Preston chuckled warmly, "I have to agree with you. It does sound like the basis for a good novel, doesn't it? But here you are."

"And here everyone else is. I know they aren't the same, but they look so much like the people I knew, it's really hard some days. Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger were my best friends in school, but they're younger than my friends would have been. Besides, they're not the same. My friend's eyes displayed the pain they had endured and that they had seen too much death, while these children have barely lived at all. And Sirius...he was the closest thing I ever had to a father; someone who wanted to take care of me. But he was always on the run...and then he died. Merlin, I had a messed up life."

"At least I have a little more context about your life though, Harry. Let's talk a little bit about how you grew up, shall we?"

At the end of the session, Preston Flook'd back to his office at St. Mungo's. "Merlin aid me," he whispered after closing the door and collapsing on his chair. "The boy was abused his entire life. Brought up to believe he was worthless, the son of unemployed drunks. And then thrown into a world where he was a celebrity, but with no knowledge of our world, customs or traditions. Nearly killed by multiple teachers whom he should have been able to trust, and then told the world counted on him being the only one to kill their Dark Lord. And after all of that, he was tortured day after day after day until he was almost completely broken, only to be brought to a world where his dead loved ones are alive again. Merlin aid me," he whispered again with his head in his hands. "How do I help him through this?"

Harry awoke when Fawkes flashed into his quarters. The brilliantly colored bird trilled a greeting to Hedwig, who responded quietly, and then jumped up to Harry's chest, who was still laying down. The phoenix presented the note in his beak to the teen, who unfolded it wondering what the Headmaster wanted.

Mr. Black,

Please stop by the staff room at 11:00 this morning. The staff and I would like to speak with you before the students return this evening.

Albus Dumbledore

He took a Muggle pen from the desk in the sitting room and wrote a brief acceptance. He gave the note to Fawkes, who demanded a few scratches before flashing away.

"I wonder what he needs to speak to me about with the rest of the staff there," Harry wondered. He checked the time and realized it was only fifteen minutes from eleven. He washed his face and combed his messy hair and then made his way to the staff room, pleased that he remembered the way from several years earlier. He also noticed that he relied on the cane less than he had the previous day. Even with the "accident", he was pleased to see steady progress physically.

He reached the staff room and rapped on the door several times with his cane. The door opened to reveal all of the staff seated around a large table. "Mr. Black, please come in," Dumbledore greeted him with a smile. "Have a seat."

Harry sat in the open chair by Professor McGonagall and leaned his cane against his knee. He nodded in general to the room, but avoided looking directly at Sirius Black. He had to remember that this was not his godfather. "What may I do for you today, sir?"

"The students are due back this evening from their Winter holidays and the school will soon be bustling with noise and adolescents. Are you ready for the chaos?" The elderly wizard's blue eyes seemed to evaluate the younger man, looking for any sign it would be too much for him.

Harry gave the Headmaster a small smile, "I'll be fine, sir. After all, I was a student here myself at one time. Well, at least the Hogwarts of my world."

"Ah yes, good point. You never did tell me what House you were in."

"The Sorting Hat said I would do well in any of the Houses. It said I had a good mind, was hard-working, had great ambition as well as bravery. Other than that, I prefer not to be defined by a House now that I'm an adult." He heard some movement from the other professors as if in protest to that comment, but kept his eyes on the Headmaster.

"Quite right, quite right Mr. Black. Well, I was going to ask if you wanted to be sorted..." He looked over his glasses at the young man.

"No thank you, sir," Harry declined firmly. He had little in common with even the oldest students. They had never experienced the horrors of war.

"Probably for the best," the Headmaster agreed. "You are a few years older than the Seventh Years and they can only relate to classes, Quidditch matches and dating, while you have a more varied interest. However, we have to explain your appearance to the students somehow, and have a place for you to sit in the Great Hall at meals. Perhaps you could be a Professor's Assistant. That would

also give you some pocket money." The older man suddenly realized that Harry was dressed differently and wondered whether he had transfigured the clothing.

"I would be happy to have his assistance," started Sirius quickly, "but after yesterday, it's probably not such a good idea." He leaned back in his chair and slumped his shoulders, once again feeling the guilt of the previous day's episode.

"Thank you for the offer, Sirius, but you are probably correct. What do you think, Mr. Black?" asked Dumbledore.

"I think an assistant who can't help with the casting might be a disadvantage in DADA, sir," agreed Harry.

Madame Hooch grinned and said, "It's a shame you're not a sports enthusiast, Mr. Black. I have an honest need for someone to help coach the various Quidditch teams. I don't suppose you played?"

"Actually, I was the youngest Seeker in a century for my House team," replied Harry.

Hooch's hawk-like eyes lit up and she leaned forward. "Really! You played in your First Year? What was your record?"

"Um, I was mostly undefeated. I only lost one game, and that was because dementors came onto the Quidditch pitch. I have a bad reaction to them. I was also Quidditch captain in my Sixth Year."

"You're hired!" she exclaimed enthusiastically. "You let me know what NEWT classes you're going to be auditing, and we'll work the coaching work around it."

"Perhaps you should ask the young man if he accepts the position," suggested Snape as he arched an eyebrow at the animated Flying teacher.

"Oh, err, yes." She seemed to deflate a bit and then turned to Harry. "You will accept, won't you? Come on, you know you want to."

Harry couldn't help but laugh at her entreaty. "As long as we can work around the classes I'm auditing so that I can take my NEWTs,

I'll be happy to help." He made a mental note to revisit Diagon Alley for a broom.

Happiness bloomed on her face again. "Excellent, just excellent!" she enthused.

The Headmaster smiled happily at seeing everything settled. "In that case, we'll announce Mr. Black as Madame Hooch's assistant. You may also sit at the staff table for meals, unless of course, you prefer to sit with the students."

"The staff table will be fine for now, sir. Thank you."

"We'll have to get you some robes," Albus started. Harry interjected quickly, "No need, sir. I visited Diagon Alley the other day and purchased some clothing and supplies." He noticed the curious faces on all of the teachers, but didn't add anything to that statement.

"I see," Albus blinked. He recovered quickly and added, "Well, congratulations Rolanda. You've hired yourself a very resourceful young man."

The students filed into the Great Hall, chattering animatedly with their friends about their holidays. "Ron!" whispered Hermione Granger. She nudged the boy who wasn't paying attention and when he turned to her with a huff, she nodded meaningfully at the staff table.

The redhead looked and his eyes widened slightly in surprise at seeing a raven-haired young man seated next to Madame Hooch.

When everyone was finally seated, Professor Dumbledore stood and smiled at the returning students. "Welcome back. I trust everyone enjoyed their holidays and are ready and eager to return to classes tomorrow." A few laughs and an equal number of groans met his statement. "You may have noticed a new face at the staff table. This is Mr. Harrison Black, who will be Madame Hooch's assistant this term. You should treat him with the same respect as any Professor. He may also audit some of the NEWT level classes."

Harry nodded to each of the House tables as his eyes swept the room.

"And now, I am certain you are all hungry, so please enjoy!" The food immediately appeared on the table and the chatter increased again throughout the Great Hall.

Rolanda Hooch's gray head leaned closer to Harry and she murmured, "You are attracting the attention of many of the young ladies, I see. I hope you are prepared to be the object of many crushes and flirts." She grinned as Harry turned horror-stricken eyes at her before he quickly resumed his neutral expression. He glanced quickly around the room and couldn't fail to notice that many of the girls were looking at him speculatively.

"Great, just great," he muttered to Rolanda's amusement.

"Harrison Black" questioned Pansy Parkinson at the Slytherin table. She looked over at Draco Malfoy and tipped her head. "Do you suppose he's related to Professor Black?"

Draco raised a supercilious eyebrow and looked at the Hooch's assistant with disdain. "There is no legitimate Black Family member of that age," he stated contemptuously. That caused another flurry of whispers among the Slytherins that spread to the Ravenclaws who heard some of the comments. Soon the rumors were flying that Harrison Black might be the illegitimate son of Sirius Black, their DADA professor.

Once the feast was over and the students had returned to their dormitories, Draco Malfoy withdrew a piece of parchment and a quill.

Dear Father,

The journey back to Hogwarts was uneventful. Upon our arrival, we were introduced to a new staff member; Harrison Black was presented as the assistant to Madame Hooch. He has the typical dark hair of the Black Family, although Mother was the exception with her fair hair. He appears to be approximately twenty years old, but we are both aware that there are no legitimate children of the Black Family of that age. It is possible that he is a Mudblood with no relation to the Ancient and Noble House of Black, but I will endeavor to learn more about him. I wanted to make you aware of his appearance.

I hope all continues to go well at home and in the Ministry.

Your Obedient Son,

Draco

"Good morning, Mr. Black," said a blond Ravenclaw as she passed Harry in the hallway. He nodded back to her as he continued towards the dungeon.

"Welcome to Hogwarts, Mr. Black" said a brunette Hufflepuff as she stood and watched him approach. "Thank you," he responded politely.

A trio of girls gave him a cheerful "Good morning", and then giggled madly as soon as they passed him.

"Merlin help me," he thought. "Hooch was right. I seem to be the 'new dish' on the smorgasbord".

He waited until all of the 7th year students entered the NEWT level Potions class, and then slipped in behind them, taking a desk at the back. Snape had approved his attendance at this mixed class that represented all four Houses.

The Potions Master swooped into the room and the door closed behind him with an apparently wordless spell. He spoke as he strode to his desk, "Today we will be starting on the Oblivious Unction potion." At the front of the room he turned with a swirl of his robes and asked, "Mr. Bombeck, what can you tell us about this potion?"

A dark-haired Hufflepuff frowned in concentration. "It was created by Dr. Ubbly, and is used to heal mental wounds."

"Mostly correct, Mr. Bombeck. Two points partial credit." He looked around the room. "Miss Standish, what did Mr. Bombeck omit?"

The strawberry blonde tipped her head as she considered, but started to speak quickly at Snape's impatient gaze. "It also heals physical wounds to the brain, sir."

"Correct, two points to Ravenclaw."

For the next fifteen minutes, the Potions Master spoke about the ingredients, their interactions and the instructions on brewing the potion. Harry had to shake his head at the difference between his Snape just writing instructions on the board and this Snape actually lecturing and teaching.

"You may now collect your ingredients and begin the potion. Summon me when you reach the Erumpent tails. If it is correct, we will put it into stasis until the next class."

Harry prepared his work surface, getting his cauldron, mortar and pestle and knives arranged, as he waited for the crush around the supply cabinet to diminish. Snape walked down the aisle towards him, and Harry noticed that none of the students seem to be terrorized at his passing.

The tall Potions Master paused next to Harry and reviewed his equipment. "I had thought you had perhaps borrowed equipment for your evaluation session with me, Mr. Black," he said quietly so that none of the students could overhear. "But I see that you are prepared again today. I must admit that I am surprised, considering how little you had upon your arrival, although you did mention visiting Diagon Alley."

Harry tried unsuccessfully to hide the smirk at being able to equip himself so quickly. "I can be inventive when the need presents itself, sir," he said noncommittally.

"Indeed, Mr. Black," the Professor responded. "The supply closet is now free." He watched Harry make his way to the closet, noticing the interest the other students gave him. His Slytherins' looks were surreptitious, while the other students were openly curious.

Harry prepared the potion carefully, reviewing his notes from the lecture as well as the book's instructions. He was surprised that Snape permitted soft whispering, but when it got louder, the Professor simply cleared his throat once, and the sound immediately quieted again. He was much more used to Snape demanding absolute silence, but found the quiet whispering was not distracting.

When his potion reached a pale ginger color, he raised his hand and said, "I'm ready for the Erumpent tails, Professor." Snape came over and inspected the cauldron and nodded once in approval. He let the

stirrer move counterclockwise once and then let the potion drip off the rod. "Very nice, Mr. Black. Good consistency and color. You would have earned five points were you not auditing the class."

Harry couldn't help it; he beamed a smile at the older man. "Thank you, sir."

The Professor drew his wand and cast a potion stasis spell, and then levitated the cauldron to a large shelf high away from the students and high enough to avoid being bumped. "You may clean up and leave when you're ready, Mr. Black." At another student's call, the Potions Master moved on to review a different potion, leaving Harry to store the rest of his ingredients and take his tools to the wash basin to thoroughly clean them. He was able to leave the room ten minutes before the end of the class and avoid the crush of students.

He was now free until later in the afternoon when he was going to review each of the House Quidditch teams with Madame Hooch. He would begin meeting the actual teams the next day. With a smile, he decided to make a quick trip to Diagon Alley and see what brooms were available.

At the end of the Order Meeting that night, the Longbottoms, Weasleys and Potters stayed until after the other adults left the room.

"How is young Mr. Black doing Albus," asked Molly. The Potions Master and DADA Professor were both about to leave, but paused.

"I think that the young man might have some Slytherin in him," Snape said with a small smirk. "He is certainly cunning enough. He already appears to have new clothes and all the brewing equipment needed for my class, as well as an unused text book needed for NEWT levels."

The Headmaster's eyes sparkled in amusement, "Indeed Severus? Interestingly, I received a note from Ollivander the other day. He let him know that our Mr. Black purchased the remaining wand that contained one of two feathers that Fawkes had donated."

Sirius thought and added, "I never even thought about it at the time, but he was using a Holly wand just before..." his voice trailed off and Dumbledore just nodded at him.

"But how could he possibly get the galleons for so many purchases," asked a bewildered Molly. "He had nothing when he arrived."

Intrigued Dumbledore called out, "Mason". An elderly elf dressed in a uniform with all four Hogwarts crests appeared. "This is Mason, the elf major-domo," he said to the others. He turned to the elderly elf and asked, "Mason, do you know what purchases Mr. Black brought into his quarters?"

"Nebby volunteered to care for the young man and his quarters," the elf said politely. "Nebby!" The young elf appeared and looked around with wide eyes before she curtsied to those present. "You is calling for Nebby?" Dumbledore repeated his question.

"The young master is having parchment and quills as well as muggle paper and pens. He also has the two changes of clothing the elves made for him, but is now having more trousers, shirts, robes and other clothing after he visited Diagon Alley and Muggle London the other day. In addition, he is having a new wand and the lovely Hedwig."

"Hedwig?" asked Lily Potter.

"Oh yes Miss Lily, Hedwig is being a white owl. Hedwig is very protective of the young master and perches on him whenever he is in the room instead of her wooden perch." She looked at the phoenix in the corner. "Fawkes likes Hedwig as well as the young master."

"Do you know how he happened to get the galleons to purchase these things," asked Albus.

"Nebby is not knowing. Would the Headmaster like Nebby to ask the young master?"

"No, that's not necessary. Thank you Nebby and Mason." The two elves popped out of the office.

Lily Potter looked at her husband and said quietly, "I have to admit that I am embarrassed and somewhat ashamed that it never occurred to me to offer our financial support to the young man."

We're responsible for Holly and Sebastian, and we should have made sure that he had everything he needed."

Alice Longbottom blushed a rosy hue as well. "I didn't think of it either, Lily." Frank added, "My mother would be ashamed that the Longbottoms didn't offer him a helping hand immediately. It is our obligation and duty."

"It's not too late," said Arthur Weasley. "I think Ron should give up half of his allowance to help Black. That would be a more substantial reminder of his part in the whole fiasco, not that his allowance is all that big."

James slapped Arthur on the back and exclaimed, "Excellent idea, Arthur! Holly and Sebastian will do the same."

Alice and Frank glanced at once another and with a nod, Frank added, "Neville as well. That will be a more lasting impact than a long essay on what could have gone wrong and the impact to Mr. Black. Offering him some type of compensation from the children is only fair."

Albus smiled appreciatively at the parents. "With that support and the small wage he'll receive as Madame Hooch's assistant, that should help him tremendously."

James looked up with interest. "Madame Hooch's assistant?"

Sirius gave a bark of laughter at his friend's immediate interest. "Yes, Harry is going to assist with all of the House Quidditch teams. It seems he was a practically undefeated Seeker in school as well as the team Captain. He wouldn't tell us what House though." He was still a bit disgruntled about that.

Lily smacked James' shoulder. "I can see it now. You're going to harass the poor boy about Quidditch, aren't you?"

"If he's going to be coaching the twins, don't you think as an interested and involved father I should be aware of what he's teaching them?" With years of practice he ignored her rolling eyes and smirked at Sirius who was laughing at him.

Madame Hooch and Harry met at the Quidditch pitch an hour before the Gryffindor team was set to arrive. At his insistence that she call him Harry, she returned that he must call her Rolanda. It was a difficult adjustment after referring to her as Madame Hooch for his entire Hogwarts career, but he made the effort.

She stood on the spelled pitch that deflected the winter snow holding a Nimbus 2004 in her hand. "What do you say, Harry? Shall we try a little one-on-one before the students arrive? That will let you practice a bit, and give me the chance to see you perform. You may have your pick of the school brooms. Some of the Cleansweeps are fairly decent."

He took the new broom he had purchased the day before from his pocket and enlarged it. He hid a chuckle that it matched the flying instructor's Nimbus 2004. Harry hadn't been able to justify replacing his professional-level Firebolt with the resources at his disposal, so settled for the very fine Nimbus model.

"Ah, very good. Did you borrow it or is it your own?" asked the flying instructor.

"I picked it up yesterday at Diagon Alley," admitted Harry. "I haven't practiced with it yet. Are you going to give me some practice time before our match?"

Rolanda chuckled and said, "Five minutes, no more! I'm older than you and need every advantage I can take!"

He immediately pushed off on the broom and made a couple of practice runs around the pitch, while Rolanda opened the boxes holding the Quaffle, Snitch and Bludgers. As she prepared for their match, Harry began accelerating and decelerating to get the true feel of the broom. He tried several practice air loops, and was pleased with the responsiveness of the broom. It didn't compare to his Firebolt, but it would serve its' purpose. At a whistle from Rolanda, he looped back and landed beside her.

She let the golden snitch free, and it zoomed away and quickly disappeared as she picked up the Quaffle. "The usual way we play one-on-one is to let the Bludgers run free and we attempt to score as often as possible while eluding them. Whenever one of us spots the snitch, we go after it. Sound good?"

Harry nodded, that sounded like a typical one-on-one match with no beaters, chasers or keepers.

"OK, you can have the first Quaffle throw, Harry." Rolanda permitted the Bludgers to soar into the sky and immediately kicked off the ground herself. Harry followed her and once they were both up in the air, he threw the Quaffle as hard up as he could, shouting "Go!"

Both flyers raced after the Quaffle, their comparable brooms making it a very even contest. Rolanda caught the Quaffle as Harry ducked the two Bludgers that hurtled towards him. He turned and zipped towards his three goalposts, trying to be in a position to block her score.

He almost missed one of the Bludgers sprinting towards him, but caught the movement out of the corner of his eye and rolled the broom over, causing the Bludger to barely miss him. Rolanda threw the Quaffle towards the center hoop just as he rolled, confident of having the first score.

To her surprise, his roll took him towards the center of the three hoops and he caught the Quaffle just before it went through his hoop. He laughed and flew past her. Now her competitor instincts overrode her evaluation of him, and she devoted herself to the game. She chased after him, pushing her broom to the limit, trying to beat him to her hoops, but was at least two meters behind him and resigned herself to him scoring the first points.

As he drew his arm back to throw the Quaffle, a Bludger streaked towards his back. "Bludger!" she cried. He shot upwards in response and the Bludger flew below him. However, his movement gave her the opportunity to catch up and she was in position when he tried to throw. Unfortunately, the second Bludger found her at that point and she had to swerve abruptly to avoid being hit. He took advantage of her movement to throw the Quaffle, and from his excited whoop, she knew he had scored.

"Cheeky brat," she called, grinning in spite of herself. Harry returned the grin and then whirled as both Bludgers came back at them and they had to separate to restart their game.

Rolanda used every trick she had learned in forty years of flying to out fly the younger man, but she had to admit that he was a natural flyer. Even on a Nimbus he had only bought the previous day, he was treating it as an extension of himself, something flyers usually could only do after a long acquaintance with their broom. They chased one another around the pitch, with some exciting points gained on either side, while using some risky moves to dodge the Bludgers.

As the game wore on, the two of them began to tease one another, twirling around the other, looping when possible, making their game into an aerial ballet. Suddenly Harry saw sunlight reflected off something and he accelerated abruptly, ignoring the Quaffle in Rolanda's hands. She followed his trajectory and realized that he had spotted the golden snitch.

"The boy is definitely a Seeker," she thought with admiration. She grinned when the snitch suddenly darted away and downwards. She pushed her broom, hoping to intercept it. The wind whistled in their ears as they both pushed their brooms to the limit, avoiding the Bludgers that suddenly reappeared. Her heart beat faster as the adrenaline rushed through her system.

They were now side by side in a race on matched brooms to see who was going to claim the golden snitch first. Each of them reached out a hand while the other clasped the broom handle tightly. The snitch was still in a downwards trajectory and Rolanda was trying to judge when she was going to have to pull up to avoid a crash, but unwilling to let Harry grab the flying ball first.

Harry kept his eye on the Snitch, expecting it to suddenly dart in another direction, but it continued its downward plunge. They were getting dangerously close to the ground now, but Harry kept his eye on the snitch. He inched forward on the broom and reached perilously over the end of the handle, even as he saw Rolanda pull up from his peripheral vision.

"Pull up!" she yelled. "Harry! Pull up!"

His hand closed around the snitch and he pulled up as sharply as he could. His feet scraped the grass on the pitch and he flew less than half a foot above the ground. He circled back and came to a halt, breathing heavily, but holding up the snitch triumphantly.

"Harrison Black! Are you insane?" Rolanda shouted at him. "You nearly frightened me to death! If that's what you're going to teach the students..."

Her voice was overridden by the sound of shouts and applause. "That was incredible!" "You're going to teach us those moves, aren't you?" "Bloody awesome!" "That was the best one-on-one I've ever seen!"

Rolanda and Harry turned around to see the Gryffindor Quidditch team running towards them with enormous grins. "I can't wait for you to coach us!" said a voice familiar to Harry.

He turned to the side and realized he was looking at Ginny Weasley. "Hi, I'm Ginny Weasley, Gryffindor Seeker," she said excitedly. "How did you judge when it was safe to keep going and when you had to pull up?"

"Hold on Ginny," said another familiar voice. Tall dark-skinned Angelina Johnson came forward and smiled at him. "Angelina Johnson, team Captain," she said with a brilliant smile. "Let me introduce you to the rest of the team."

"We have an embarrassment of redheads this year," she began only to be interrupted with boo's and hisses from the Weasley twins who began their twinspeak.

"Now is that a..."

"...nice thing to say, Angelina?"

"Hush you two," she said with a frown that carried no weight behind it. "Those two jokers are Seventh Years Fred and George Weasley, our Beaters. The redhead behind them is Ron, our Keeper, a Fifth Year. I'm a Seventh Year and one of the Chasers and the Potter twins are the other two Chasers and are in their Fifth Year."

Harry glanced at the auburn-haired Holly and the dark-haired Sebastian; he hadn't really scrutinized them before. Now he could see the resemblance to Lily and James Potter. He nodded politely to the entire team and turned back to Angelina with a small grin, "Two

sets of twins? You have my deepest empathy, Miss Johnson." Both of them ignored the huffs and protests from the twins.

Madame Hooch coughed lightly and Harry remembered that he had a reason for being on the pitch. "Now that we've been introduced, let me tell you a little about myself. I was a Seeker, undefeated except for one game, and Captain of my team for one year. Why don't we start by you showing me some of your moves and plays, and I'll see where I can offer the team any help or advice."

Angelina and all of the Weasleys played pretty much the way he remembered them, although he had taught his world's Ginny a few more moves than this one demonstrated. He turned his attention to the Potter twins. Where Sebastian had the same messy dark hair he and James had, Holly had a reddish brown colour, not quite the dark red of Lily, but almost a mix between her parents. They both had trim builds, with Sebastian leaning towards wiry while Holly was more willowy. They moved easily among the other players, passing the Quaffle and anticipating one another's moves. They followed Angelina's direction, but he wouldn't be surprised if they could score just as easily with only the two of them. They didn't have the boisterous nature of the Weasley twins, but had more subtle and unassuming personalities.

He pushed off on his own broom and flew to Ginny, offering her some advice on refining her moves and introducing a few others.

At the end of the practice, the boys locker room was echoing with excitement and chatter. "He really knows how to fly and play," enthused Ron Weasley. "With his help, we'll beat Slytherin for sure!"

"Don't forget that he's going to be coaching all of the teams," Sebastian Potter reminded him.

"Oh bollocks!" Ron muttered. "I did forget he wasn't ours alone." He grinned at his brothers. "Maybe you can convince him to give the Gryffindor team a little extra help?"

"Or maybe we'll wind up with points taken," interjected Sebastian, ignoring the grinning ginger twins.

"We'll dynamite that bridge and..."

"...cover the bodies with lime.."

"..when we come to it."

Ron frowned at his older brothers who had taken to using Muggle expressions. Somehow, that didn't seem like quite the right phrasing, but he couldn't spot what was wrong with it.

OoOoOoOo

Chapter 7 – Minister Who?

A small pop announced the presence of Nebby with a light snack. While Harry tried to eat lunch and dinner in the Great Hall, sometimes he couldn't bear all of the noise and barely touched his dinner. Somehow, Nebby always seemed to know when that happened and brought a snack to his quarters later in the evening. Harry smiled at the helpful house elf as he said, "Thank you, Nebby. That's just what I need tonight."

Nebby's ears twitched with pleasure at the praise and she settled a tray with crusty fresh bread and cheese, apple slices, raisins, blueberry scones and warm tea. She stepped back and then watched the young man with wide and nervous eyes.

Harry immediately noticed the difference in her behavior and asked, "Is anything wrong, Nebby? Is there something I can do?"

The house elf wrung her hands and cried, "Master Harry is so good and Nebby is such a bad elf! Nebby should be punishing herself, she should!"

"Calm down, Nebby," Harry said and he knelt before the distraught house elf. He placed a gentle hand on her shoulder. "Why don't you tell me what's wrong and perhaps we can solve it together."

Tears welled up in the large eyes. "Master Harry is such a good man! But the young master won't be pleased when Nebby tells him..." She reached up her hands to tug at her ears, but Harry captured them before she could do any damage.

"It will be OK, Nebby," he soothed her. "Just tell me what happened."

"Nebby was summoned to Headmaster Professor Dumblydore's office by Mason, the head house elf. Headmaster Professor Dumblydore asked Nebby what purchases the young master brought into his quarters. Nebby should have kept the young master's secrets, she should have! But ..."

"But you are bound to the castle and the Headmaster runs the castle," Harry said with an indulgent smile. "I'm not mad at you, Nebby. It's OK." He spent a couple of minutes calming the house elf,

who could only exclaim about how considerate and kind the young master was before he finally convinced her to return to work.

Once he was alone in his quarters again, he said softly, "No, I'm not mad at you, Nebby. But the manipulative old coot is another story entirely."

Harry sat at the back of the Charms room, away from the other students. He nodded neutrally to the girls that lingered near his table to blush and smile at him. He had laid his bag on the chair next to him, and was grateful that no one asked him to move his materials so they could take that seat. He put the Standard Book of Spells, Grade 7 on the desk, and a muggle notebook and biro to take notes.

Professor Flitwick was remarkably like his counterpart in Harry's world. His diminutive form was still topped by a shock of white hair, and his voice carried a familiar squeaky tone. He also stood on a stack of books to see over his desk and smiled warmly at the room after taking attendance.

"Today we will be starting on the Protean Charm," the Professor began. Harry immediately felt a smile warm his face as he remembered how Hermione used that spell to charm gold galleons employed to schedule the secret DA meetings in their Sixth Year. He felt a wave of homesickness wash over him and had to force himself away from those memories and focused on the professor who was into his lecture. "This charm may be cast on multiple objects. When cast successfully, it will reveal the same information to everyone who carries one of the charmed objects. Who can think of a use for the charm?"

He looked around the room at the young faces who were trying without success to think of a use for it. The Professor noticed a small smile on their guest and finally said, "Mr. Black? Can you think of a use for this charm?"

Harry looked up in surprise at being called on. "It would be helpful to schedule meetings for people scattered in different areas," he replied.

"An excellent use," the Professor said with excitement. "Now, the wand movement is a 'U' shaped movement followed by a quick flick." He demonstrated the movement and had the class practice.

Harry had always let Hermione cast the spell, so was pleased to have a chance to practice it himself. When he was confident of the movement, he noticed that Flitwick was still moving around the classroom correcting wand movements, so he pulled out 'Quintessence, a Guide' to read the supplementary information on the spell.

When the class was done, Harry headed towards the Quidditch pitch to work with the Ravenclaw team before dinner. His one-on-one game with Rolanda had raced through the student rumor mill, and he was surprised at how welcoming the Ravenclaw team was.

Rolanda stayed close long enough to introduce him to the team Captain, Rodger Davies who then introduced him to the rest of the team. Harry chatted about with them about what the team saw as their strengths and weaknesses. At one point, he had to stop as Eddie Carmichael, one of the Beaters was speaking. The Fifth Year held his broom in his hand and was swinging it back and forth slightly. "Mr. Carmichael," he said as he looked at the younger teen, "when was the last time you performed maintenance on your broom?"

A flush filled the brown-haired Beater cheeks as he stuttered a response. "Broom maintenance can mean the difference between winning and losing a game," Harry declared as he looked around at the team. "You must check the bristles before and after every flight. A bent bristle can impact how the broom handles, how it speeds up or how it slows down. The shaft needs to be cleaned and waxed on a regular basis. Too much wax and you will have trouble staying on. Too little and it will slow down in the air. If you want your team to win, you each need to take care of your broom, even if it's a school broom."

After that, they pushed off into the air and ran through their practice with Harry offering tips and techniques to each of the players.

Harry jerked into a sitting position on his bed, gasping as his heart pounded in his chest. His body was slick with sweat. He took a deep and shaky breath and then shook his head. "I can't keep this up," he muttered in despair. "I can't live like this."

He was waiting for Preston at the fireplace when he Floo'd through in the morning.

"Good morning, Harry," the older man said as his eyes raced over the tense form of the younger man. "I gather you didn't have a good night's sleep?"

"I don't know what to do, Preston," Harry admitted, "but I can't keep this up. I only get two nights of decent sleep a week, and that's with the Dreamless Sleep." He rubbed his eyes tiredly. "I just don't know what to do. I want to bundle up all these memories and lock them away behind a high security vault at Gringotts."

"Blocking the memories will cause them to sneak up on you when you least expect it, Harry. If we work through the emotions you felt when it occurred, that will not only offer an outlet for the emotions you want to bottle up, but as hard as it is to believe now, it will help restore your sense of control and reduce the powerful hold the memories have on your life."

Harry stared at him for several long moments and then heaved a deep shuddering sigh. "I'll try to believe that. What now."

"Why don't you tell me about the dream?"

Harry had screamed on occasion, but not as often as the death eaters seemed to crave. The teen held out as long as he could, and even when a sound came, it barely escaped through tightly clenched jaws and lips pressed together with determination. He thought he might have cracked some of the teeth clenching them so tightly.

They broke each bone only to heal them and break them again. They cut him open with Reducto and Diffindo, only to heal the bleeding and torn flesh. And yet he held on to the almost invisible spark of hope that somehow he would be found and rescued.

Voldemort entered the cell with Lucius and Bellatrix and looked around with distaste. If he still had a nose, it would have crinkled at the smell. With limbs that trembled and betrayed him, Harry tried to stand and lean against the cold stone wall. He was filthy, matted with his own blood and urine, and still he tried to stand before his tormentors.

"You will never win," he hissed through teeth clenched in pain. "You can kill me, but you will still not win."

"Oh Harry, do you think we're going to kill you?" He stroked Harry's cheek almost lovingly. "No, no, my dear boy, we're going to break you and then remold you into my perfect servant."

This almost did reap a scream as the teen's voice rasped harshly "You will never turn me Dark and I will never give in."

Voldemort merely laughed in sincere amusement and hissed, "Let's play a game together, shall we Harry?" With a voiceless spell, he cast a bone-crushing hex at Harry's leg, causing an impossibly white bone to jut out through the filthy skin. The boy gasped and shifted his weight to his left leg, his hands reaching the chains above the manacles to help keep him up.

"Very good, Harry, but the game isn't over." He cast another bone-crushing hex at the right thigh and the boy turned even whiter beneath the dirty and bloodied face. His hands clung to the chains in desperation, trying to keep the weight off the shattered and broken bones.

He pointed the wand at the raven-haired young man and began breaking bones with pleased precision until the Harry couldn't keep the screams inside any longer. He screamed until blood escaped his lips and tears ran down his face. It was a long time before the darkness claimed him.

Harry stayed in his room for most of the day after Preston left. He had promised not to lock his emotions and memories away, so spent most of the day practicing meditation and Occlumency techniques until he finally felt calm and controlled again. By then, it was time to join the Slytherin team for their practice session.

Rolanda's sharp eyes seemed to see the tension hidden behind the layers of control he was holding and asked, "Are you all right today, Harry? Do you want me to take this practice?"

He gave a small smile of appreciation at the older woman for her concern. "I'll be fine, but thank you." They walked onto the pitch and Rolanda said, "This is Mr. Black, my assistant. He will be coaching you for the remainder of the season. Montague there is the Captain and chaser. I'll let him introduce the rest of the team to you." She headed back to her office, leaving them to the practice.

Montague nodded to Harry and introduced the other Slytherins. They included William Vaisey and Charles Warrington as the other two chasers and Miles Bletchley as keeper. Harry had to control his reaction for the last three team members, Greg Goyle and Vince Crabbe as beaters and Draco Malfoy as seeker.

It was hard to face the younger mirror image of Lucius Malfoy after his nightmare, but the hours of meditation worked. He greeted the younger Malfoy with outward indifference, even as he forced himself not to draw his wand. The years of hostility between the junior Malfoy and himself had been a source of constant frustration in his world.

As the practice continued, Harry noticed slight differences between his world's Malfoy and this one. His world's Draco carried himself with obnoxious pride and a perpetual sneer on his face. This one was confident and aristocratic, but meticulously civil. His world's Malfoy carried himself as though he clearly believed that the world owed him deference, while this one carried himself with the elegant grace of a young prince.

Harry spent most of the practice with the chasers and keeper, but finally flew near the blonde seeker forced by his sense of fairness to offer his best coaching on Rolanda's behalf. "You might consider keeping your thumb on top of the shaft, rather than the side," he said. "If you keep it pointed in the direction you wish to head, it gives you a slight handling advantage, and every little bit helps." He noticed that Malfoy made the suggested adjustment without comment and blinked in surprise. His world's Malfoy would have sneered and talked about his years of experience.

The next day, after another nightmare that blended the Dursley verbal abuse and the Death Eaters humiliation, Harry struggled to maintain a cool composure as he entered the Potions class. He carefully took the cauldron out of stasis and step by step completed the Oblivious Uncion potion. He labeled and brought the vials to Snape for his review, thinking it was a shame he wasn't getting points or being graded, as it seemed to be a good batch.

Snape took the vials and opened one, sniffing it delicately. He then dipped a finger into the mixture and tasted the minute sample. He nodded and re-corked the vial. "Well done, Mr. Black," he said again surprising Harry with this Snape's behavior. To his further

astonishment, the Potion Master cast a quick Muffliato around them, keeping their conversation private. As he slid the other vials back over to the younger man, he said quietly, "You might find it efficacious to question Healer MacMillian about employing the potion during your treatment."

Harry raised surprised eyes to the older man's impassive face. "I...thank you, Professor, I'll do that." The Potion Master nodded and silently ended the Muffliato. "You are dismissed, Mr. Black"

Harry carefully packed away the vials as well as the rest of his supplies. As he exited the room, he paused to consider the Potions Master. An eyebrow rose as he examined the older man, and he ducked his head and quickly left the room as the other students completed their potions.

That afternoon, Harry met the Hufflepuff Quidditch team. He had to hold in a sigh as Zacharias Smith swaggered forward at Rolanda's introduction. The tall blonde had been an annoyance in his own world, especially in the DA meetings. He constantly questioned and challenged Harry and had been publicly skeptical of his skill and leadership abilities. He continued his criticisms outside of the DA until the Weasley twins had threatened him. He took revenge on the Weasleys by suggesting during a Quidditch commentary that only Ron's friendship to Harry gained him a place as the Gryffindor keeper.

"Allow me to introduce the team," Smith said with great self-importance. "Our other two chasers are Applebee and Cadwallar, our beaters are Rickett and O'Flaherty, keeper is manned by Fleet and Summerby is our new seeker. We expect to bring the House Cup to Hufflepuff this year, with or without your help."

The other team members had the grace to look appalled at their Captain's rude comments. Harry merely inclined his head, "Confidence is a good thing, Mr. Smith. Arrogance will cause a team to fail." He turned to everyone else and ran an experience eye over the brooms, ignoring Smith's huff of self-importance. "I see everyone practices good broom maintenance. Well done. Let's push off and see how you do in the air, so that I can evaluate each position."

The Hufflepuff team was actually pretty good, although their seeker didn't have the experience that Cedric Diggory had learned over the

years. He took the time to share some tips and techniques with the younger player, who seemed to devour the advice.

Harry knew he was dreaming, but he seemed unable to wake himself.

He found himself in Hogsmeade enjoying a weekend visit. Hermione was browsing the bookstore while Ron was in Zonko's. Harry leaned against the Zonko's building, enjoying the warm spring sunshine on his face as he waited for his two friends.

A muffled cry abruptly cut off from the alley behind the store gained his attention and he walked into the alley to investigate. Almost immediately, he realized there were three black-robed figures cursing a figure on the ground. A Hogwarts student was on the ground, thrashing in agony under a pain curse, but obviously silenced so that no one could hear him. One of the three saw his approach and immediately cast a stunning spell at him. The other two turned as well, and Harry realized they wore white masks. "Death Eaters!" he realized. He had his wand out and a shield up before the first spell reached him, but it crumbled under repeated assaults. He felt pain blossom in his shoulder and chest even as he cast the shield again. After a short but fierce battle, one of the attackers fell to Harry's counter attack and then fortunately the noise drew the attention of his two friends who had begun to look for him. Once Ron and Hermione appeared, the other two Death Eaters fled. Harry collapsed in pain and let the darkness take him.

He awoke in the Hogwarts Infirmary in the bed. The other student had been Crucio'd severely while Harry had deep cuts made by a Diffindo. Madame Pomfrey his wounds while fondly reprimanding him for his reckless behavior, while Hermione and Ron stood nearby.

As he lay on the bed after Madame Pomfrey left, Hermione shook her head and said in a trembling voice, "I was so worried when you weren't outside the store and then we heard the sounds of the fighting. What happened?"

Before Harry could answer her question, Albus Dumbledore came around the privacy screen with several other figures. "Indeed, Miss Granger," he said. "We are all wondering the same thing." The Headmaster was joined by Professor McGonagall and Auror Kingsley Shacklebolt.

Harry gazed up at the two teachers and began retelling the details of his ordeal while the Auror took notes for an official report. When Harry finished recounting the battle, the Headmaster asked, "What happened to the man who died, Harry?"

Harry frowned slightly. "Did the one on the ground die then? I wasn't certain what happened."

"Yes, Harry," Dumbledore replied, his voice heavy with sorrow and disapproval. "Why didn't you try to escape once you saw they were Death Eaters?"

Harry looked at the elderly wizard in confusion. "I went into the alley because I heard someone call out for help. I couldn't run because they would have cut me down from behind. They were casting lung stopping curses, Sectumsempra, Diffindo and Confringo. I tried stunning them, but as soon as one was stunned, one of the others revived him. I finally cast a Diffindo at one, trying to sever his wand hand. If he died, it probably cut an artery causing him to bleed out." He was pleased to see that Shacklebolt at least seemed to approve his actions.

His Head of House interjected, "Well done on keeping cool in an impossible situation, Mr. Potter. While regrettable, sometimes one must fight back with deadly force." Harry gave her a smile of gratitude, which faded when the Headmaster replied.

"Minerva, there are always choices. It is important to do what is right rather than what is easy," the older man responded in a grandfatherly tone.

Harry pushed himself upright in the bed and ignored the pain in his chest and shoulders as he glared in disbelief at the elderly wizard. "Headmaster, what are you saying? What part of the encounter do you think was easy? I was fighting for my life against three adult wizards who were trying to kill me! Do you even care that Death Eaters were able to infiltrate Hogsmeade and nearly murdered a student or are you more concerned about the fact that I fought back and won?"

Madame Pomfrey stalked up to the bed and glared at visitors. "I believe it's time that you left my patient to rest and recover." She

was appalled that the headmaster appeared to be more concerned that the teen had killed one of his attackers than the fact that he was attacked and severely injured.

With a sigh, Dumbledore looked sadly at the injured teen and shook his head before he turned and swept out of the hospital room. With a flick of her wand, Madame Pomfrey closed the doors behind him.

Kingsley Shacklebolt shook his head briefly and then said, "If you wouldn't mind sharing your memory of the event, Mr. Potter, I think we can wrap up the investigation quickly."

He woke up, trembling in anger at Albus Dumbledore again. The man had always seemed to censure him whenever he harmed an opponent, even one trying to kill him. It was as if the man thought he was turning dark just because he fought to win. Against multiple opponents, Stupefy didn't work. One of the others simply enervated the downed Death Eater and they were back in the fight, but Dumbledore always seemed to want the Death Eaters to be captured alive, ignoring that they would soon bribe their way out or just wait for Voldemort to break them out of jail...again.

When Preston came to visit, they discussed his love-hate relationship with his world's Albus Dumbledore. Preston never took sides, but listened to his young patient and helped him work through his emotions.

"Oh, I almost forgot!" Harry said suddenly. "We brewed the Oblivious Unction potion this week, and Professor Snape suggested I ask you about 'the efficacy of employing it in my treatment'." He mimicked the Potion Master's silky tones to the best of his ability, earning a smile from Preston.

"I have been considering it myself," the Healer admitted. "I just didn't have immediate access to the potion. It's not available at St. Mungo's without a special request."

Harry retrieved the vials from his bedroom and handed them to the Healer. "I researched the potion when it was assigned. I didn't see any strong disadvantages to it. What are your thoughts?"

Preston held the potions up to the light and nodded at the color. "Dr. Ubbly's Oblivious Unction potion has been proven to be effective in

healing both physical and mental injuries. I would be willing to have you try it. You would take one vial now, and then another before sleeping. It won't erase your memories, but it will give you some distance from them." He looked at Harry and added, "If you want to try it, I don't believe it will harm you and may be helpful, but it's up to you."

Harry held out his hand and accepted the vial from Preston. "Anything is better than what I've been living with," he admitted. He opened the vial and drank the mixture down, grimacing at the bitter taste. Preston waited several minutes, casting several diagnostic charms every minute. After ten minutes he said, "Tell me about last night's dream again."

To his surprise, Harry was able to recount the dream as well as the actual experience without the anger and sense of betrayal that usually accompanied such a memory. He smiled at Preston, "The memories are all there, but it's as if they are muted, even dulled a little."

Preston returned the smile. "Take another dose before bed and we'll talk again in the morning." He Floo'd out, leaving Harry feeling a slight tinge of optimism for the first time in a long time.

That afternoon, Harry Floo'd to the Leaky Cauldron and after a wave to Tom, he passed through to the courtyard to tap the bricks to open the portal to Diagon Alley. He would have vehemently denied that he had a spring in his step as he headed to Dewrwas' Armor, but he couldn't fail to admit that he was really looking forward to seeing what the armor maker had done with the basilisk hide.

"Welcome Mr. Black," Dewrwas said warmly as he entered the shop. "I am looking forward to you trying on your new armor. The armorer brought the newly made outfit to a changing room in the back, and ushered Harry into the room, drawing the curtain behind him.

The armor was a shimmering black that was almost iridescent when the light caught it. He was surprised at how silky it was against his skin, but figured the armorer had used something soft to line the pieces. He quickly changed into the tunic, pants and boots. He was pleased to see the boots had the hidden sheath for a dagger as he had requested. He drew on the gloves and stepped out of the room.

"Oh, very nice, very nice indeed," said Dewrwas as he walked around Harry with a critical eye. "It fits you very well. Walk around the shop and then sit down. Let's make sure it's comfortable everywhere."

Once the armorer was confident that Harry could move easily and that he was satisfied with the armor, he asked to use pictures of the armor. He had photos ready that had been taken on a dummy, and Harry had to admit it looked impressive. "By all means," he approved.

He went back to the changing room and reluctantly took off the armor. He had to admit that he looked dangerous and capable in it, and liked that image. He briefly considered wearing it under his other clothing, but decided he would need to have them adjusted to wear over the armor without being too tight. Once changed, Dewrwas packed the suit for him. "It is resistant to shrinking," the Armorer warned as he handed him full-sized bags, "but that means it will also be resistant to offensive spells." Harry agreed that being resistant to offensive spells was more important than shrinking his purchase. He shook hands with Dewrwas and promised to recommend him to others.

Once back in the Alley, he paused two doors away from the Armorer's to look into a small shop called "The Glass Menagerie" that he didn't remember from his world.

He entered the small shop and was greeted with a warm smile by a pretty woman with long brown hair only a few years older than he was. The shelves were lined with beautiful blown glass objects, including a variety of normal and magical animals on one wall. Near the front counter was a case filled with glass jewelry; some with metal flecks that created a shimmery metallic look while others seemed to have layers of colors creating striking pieces. A series of two meter tall shelves down the center of the store contained displays of vases, bowls, perfume bottles and even an entire shelf of colorful blown glass flowers.

When Harry was at the far end of the store examining a series of plates swirling with colors, the door bell rang again. He was surprised that rather than the warm greeting he had received, he heard a gasp from the pretty young woman. He looked around the

display to discover that several figures in dark cloaks that hid their faces had entered the shop.

One sneering voice said, "You made a mistake opening a shop in Diagon Alley when pureblood business owners could have used this space."

With a voice that was only slightly shaking, the woman answered, "They had the same opportunity as my family did to purchase the property."

"Shut up you worthless Mudblood," one of the figures ridiculed. He withdrew his wand and held it on the shop keeper as two others began to physically knock the glass on the floor, shattering it into hundreds of pieces and mixing the glass too much for a Reparo to be effective.

They only had one shelf destroyed before a red bolt of light hit one of the robed figures and he collapsed on the ground. When the other figures saw Harry, they each cast a Stupefy, one at the shop keeper and one at Harry. He dodged the poorly cast Stupefy and returned it, knocking out the other vandal. The other robed figure ran out of the store as Harry ran to the front of the stop. He paused only long enough to step heavily on their wand hands until he felt the bones break. He shouted to the shopkeeper as he opened the door, "Take their wands and cast Incarcerous on them!" and then ran out of the shop in pursuit of the third vandal.

That figure began casting randomly, causing panic in the street. Harry shouted once to stop before innocent shoppers would be hurt. He cast another Stupefy, trying to stop the figure, who he thought was a man. Just as he had the figure in his sights, he felt himself forcibly thrown into a shop window, his head hitting the floor heavily. He felt himself starting to lose consciousness even as his body registered the pain of multiple pieces of glass in his torso.

Brandon Alteric was a newly graduated Auror. When he joined his partner on a call about a disturbance in Diagon Alley, he was ready to defend the populace and show the DMLE just what he was made of. He wasn't a typical rookie; he came from a long line of Aurors and would prove that he could hold his own with the best of them!

As they entered the Alley, he saw the people screaming and running away from two men. One appeared to be running away while the other was a dark-haired man who was drawing a bead on him with his wand. He immediately banished the dark-haired man into a nearby shop window, thereby saving the fleeing shopper.

To his shock, not only did his own partner hit him upside the head, but the other shoppers turned on him in anger. "Why didn't you stop the other one? That man was trying to save us! Why did you let the other one escape?"

His partner, Duncan Haldane, quickly discovered that the man had run out of "The Glass Menagerie" and entered the store to find two incarcerated prisoners. "What happened here, Miss," he asked respectfully with a sideways glare at his partner to keep quiet.

The pretty young woman was shaking and he quickly conjured a stool for her. "Three of them came in wearing those dark robes. I think they were Blood Purists. They said my family didn't deserve to have this shop when a pureblood could have used it. When I said other business folks had the same opportunity that we did to buy the property, one drew a wand on me and the others began destroying the merchandise. The other shopper stunned two of them and chased the third when he tried to escape." She looked up at the two Aurors and added, "Where is he? He's a real hero. I need to thank him! He saved me and most of our stock!"

Brandon Alteric realized that he had just started a very bad day of what would be a very bad week.

Harry awoke in a small sterile room. He didn't recognize where he was, and slowly got out of bed. He felt twinges of pain around his body, but nothing too bad. He realized suddenly that he was in a hospital gown. "Oh great," he muttered. "If I'm not at Hogwarts, it must be St. Mungo's. I hope no one else was hurt."

He was pleased to see his clothing inside the wardrobe and had just begun to take it out when the door opened. "I'm glad to see you're awake, Harry." The young man turned at hearing Preston's familiar voice.

"Preston! What's going on?"

"Do you remember being in Diagon Alley yesterday, Harry?"

"Yesterday?" Harry asked in surprise. "I've been here overnight?" At Preston's nod, Harry couldn't help but groan. "Yes, I remember that three masked figures started breaking all the merchandise in a shop I was in. I was able to stun two, but the third ran out." He stopped and looked at Preston with surprise and a small but growing smile. "They cast at me, but I kept fighting!"

"I think the Oblivious Unction potion is working," the Healer said with a warm smile. "You were able to keep fighting even with someone casting at you."

"I don't think they cast a Reducto or bone-crushing spell, but yeah, I didn't have a flashback," the younger man said with relief.

"Do you want to know what happened after you were knocked out?" asked the older man.

"Yeah, how did I get thrown into a window? Was there one I didn't see?"

"Ah, that's a story. Why don't you sit down." Harry sat on his bed and Preston sat in the guest chair. "Apparently the fight was reported to the Aurors, and a young and overly-enthusiastic gentlemen just out of training was one of those that answered the call. He saw you about to cast on what he thought might be a fleeing shopper, and banished you into a store window. You were cut up pretty badly and suffered a concussion."

Harry sighed and said, "Great, more scars."

"Well actually, I think the Dittany that was applied will prevent any new scarring. Also, the Daily Oracle ran a long story about with the headline, 'Hero Downed Protecting Others'." He chuckled as Harry groaned and fell back on the bed, pulling the pillow over his head.

A brief knock was followed by the door immediately opening. Harry ignored the intrusion and kept the pillow over his face, while Preston looked at the newcomer with a raised eyebrow. He looked back at the bed and said calmly, "Harry, I think you have a guest."

Harry lifted the pillow off his face and almost immediately wanted to replace it as he recognized the figure. Standing in the room was an older man who bore a distinct resemblance to an old lion, with a tawny grey-streaked hair and sharp yellow eyes not quite hidden by his wire-rimmed spectacles. "My apologies for intruding, Mr. Black," he said although his manner indicated otherwise. He limped forward with an outstretch hand which Harry reluctantly shook. "I am Senior Auror Rufus Scrimgeour. The Department of Magical Law Enforcement would like to apologize for the injuries you sustained. May I have a few moments to take a statement?"

"In that case, I will excuse myself. Harry, Healer Strout authorized your release, so you can dress and check out at any time. I'll see you at Hogwarts in the morning, but call me if you need me before then." He nodded to Scrimgeour and departed.

After a cursory review of the event in Diagon Alley, Scrimgeour returned his wand and the package with the armor. "That's a very impressive suit of battle armor, Mr. Black," he commented.

"Gwilym Dewrwas is a very skilled Armorer," he replied neutrally.

Scrimgeour looked like he wanted to follow up on basilisk armor, but chose another topic. "The Minister of Magic also would like to apologize for the misunderstanding that resulted in your injury. You are invited to his office for a 'meet-and-greet'."

Harry grimaced, "Do I have to?" He didn't know if he could stomach a meeting with Cornelius Fudge.

"The Minister would appreciate it," the Head Auror responded.

The teen heaved a sigh and asked, "OK, when?"

"As soon as you're dressed, if that's acceptable." Harry reluctantly nodded and waited for the man to leave so that he could get dressed.

Rufus Scrimgeour escorted him to the public Floo in the St. Mungo's lobby and then stepped through first to the Ministry of Magic. Harry had to have his wand weighed and registered by a bored attendant and then followed the older man to the Minister's office.

Harry was not looking forward to speaking with Cornelius Fudge. The man had been an incompetent sycophant in his world. He had despised the rotund and officious man for his refusal to see what he didn't want to see, such as Voldemort's resurrection. Because of him, Voldemort had a full year to build his forces unopposed.

He noticed that the secretary wasn't Percy Weasley, but an attractive woman in her thirties. The name plate on her desk read "Gweneth Cresswell".

"Minister Malfoy will be with you in a few minutes," the secretary said.

Harry stiffened as he replayed her words in his mind and looked at the door in horror. "Lucius Malfoy, Minister of Magic" was the engraved brass plate on the closed door.

Lucius Malfoy? The man who systematically tortured him and smirked with satisfaction when he finally screamed? He looked at the door and thought about leaving, but had no explanation he could give other than not feeling well. He didn't know if he could keep himself from attacking the man instantly.

With a slightly shaking hand, he withdrew his wand and laid it on the secretary's desk. "If you would hold this for me please? I'm sure security must be maintained for the Minister." He also placed his bag from Dewrwas' against her desk. Although she looked at him oddly, she placed the wand in a desk drawer. Scrimgeour seemed to evaluate him curiously, but he ignored them both and worked on raising his Occlumency shields to full strength to help contain and control his emotions. "This is not the same man," he repeated to himself over and over.

After several minutes, a crystal on Cresswell's desk lit up, and she said, "Minister Malfoy can see you now." She opened the door for them, and then closed it behind them once they were in the luxurious and well appointed office.

Lucius Malfoy was a tall, elegant and aristocratic figure. His long pale blond hair was tied neatly back with a velvet ribbon. Clear grey eyes were the focus on his otherwise pale face. He was dressed in a conservative yet obviously tailor-made charcoal grey robe with silver embroidery.

"Ah, Mr. Black. Welcome and thank you for coming to see me." He offered a hand to Harry who forced himself to shake it, stopping the touch as soon as politeness was satisfied. "Rufus, I'm sure you have more important things to attend to," he added to Scrimgeour. The older man nodded and excused himself. Malfoy asked the secretary for tea and waved Harry to a seat in front of the fireplace. He settled himself elegantly in the chair across from his young visitor. "The Ministry is appalled that a young man who was risking his own life to protect others was injured while doing so."

Harry accepted the cup of tea from the older man and declined anything in it. "I can understand the Auror's actions," he said briefly. "They heard there was a disturbance and saw me casting. While I would have preferred a Stupefy to a Banishment, I can understand acting to prevent more injuries and sorting it out later."

"You are very generous, Mr. Black." Malfoy took a sip of his tea before he asked nonchalantly, "Are you attached to the Ancient and Noble House of Black?"

"If I am, it is only remotely, sir. Although I have had the pleasure of meeting Sirius Black."

"Ah yes, I heard that you were staying at Hogwarts. Assisting the Quidditch teams, I believe?"

Harry nodded, "You are well-informed, Minister. I am helping Madame Hooch in addition to auditing some classes in preparation for taking my NEWTs. I met a Mr. Draco Malfoy this week, the seeker for the Slytherin team."

"My son," Malfoy replied with pride. "How would you evaluate his performance?"

"He is quite skilled. He only needs to fine-tune some movements and perhaps focus a bit more. He demonstrated advanced flying skills."

Lucius smiled slightly with obvious pleasure at the praise of his son. "As you are new to Hogwarts, may I assume you were educated elsewhere?"

"I was primarily home-schooled, sir," Harry lied easily. "While I believe I was trained well enough to pass all of the NEWTs, the Headmaster and professors very kindly permitted me to audit some classes to confirm my preparedness."

"I am surprised that you became Seeker on a team when you were home-schooled," Lucius probed blandly.

"A publicly organized league held during the summer," Harry invented quickly. "We played a game every weekend. It was hectic, but we had more competition that way."

"Intriguing," said the blonde. "Obviously your training was adequate in Defense, Mr. Black. I understand there were three assailants and you incapacitated two of them."

"Defense was always one of my better subjects," he smiled deprecatingly. "Much better than Divination, at least. I definitely don't have any talent there."

Lucius ignored the deflection and said, "Not many would risk a three on one contest. You must have been very certain of your skill."

Harry chuckled and replied, "Or very foolish."

Lucius looked at him and then gave another formal smile, as he set his tea cup down. "Perhaps, Mr. Black. I must thank you for your tolerance towards the Aurors who injured you." Harry put his tea cup down as well, and breathed a sigh of relief that the meeting was obviously ending.

"I'm certainly willing to be understanding to anyone who is willing to put their life on the line to protect innocents," he said as he stood. He reluctantly took Malfoy's hand and gave it a quick shake, hoping his Occlumency shields kept his face from showing the distaste he felt at touching the man.

He reclaimed his wand and bag from the secretary and headed to the lobby to Floo back to Hogwarts.

At dinner that night, he sat next to Rolanda. To her left was Minerva McGonagall and then the Headmaster.

"Are you feeling all right, Harry," Rolanda asked as soon as he joined them.

"I'm fine," he smiled. "Just a few bumps and bruises. I'll be ready to work with the teams at their next practice."

"I'm more worried about you than the practice sessions, you dunderhead," she snorted. "What were you doing in Diagon Alley anyway?"

"Picking up some clothing I had made," he said shortly. He looked around the two women at the Headmaster and said coldly, "I would have been happy to discuss my purchases if anyone had simply asked me." Albus had the grace to look both surprised and embarrassed.

"You are correct, Mr. Black. I should have," admitted Albus.

Harry deliberately turned away from him, speaking quietly to Severus who was seated on his other side. "I would like to thank you for your recommendation, Professor. Preston agreed with you and I've already taken two doses of the Oblivious Unction potion. They seem to be helping."

"I am pleased to know it proved effective," Severus said, inclining his head.

"Indeed. If I hadn't already had it, meeting the Minister of Magic would have been more arduous than it already was." Harry turned slightly to glare at the Headmaster again.

"You met the Minister," asked Rolanda. "How did that happen?"

"He wanted to personally apologize for my injuries," Harry shrugged. "It would have been nice if someone had prepared me, especially someone who knew my reaction to his counterpart in my world," he hissed. His stomach twisted and he threw his napkin down. "Forgive me, Rolanda, but I've lost my appetite."

He left through the Staff entrance behind their table. Severus raised an eyebrow at the Headmaster, while Minerva whispered, "What was that all about?"

Albus sighed heavily, "That was me making two mistakes in a row with our young guest," he confessed.

OoOoOoOo

I hope you enjoyed this chapter. It was harder than normal to get out as I caught a virus that has been going around my office which took a toll on me. After working 45 hours a week, I can barely make it home and have dinner before I'm ready for bed. That doesn't leave much time for writing, which is why this chapter is later than normal. I may need to take a week's break to get myself back in shape before continuing the story.

Chapter 8 – Black's a Parselmouth!

The wizard confirmed by way of the guardian portrait that Harrison Black was within his quarters, and asked it to announce his presence. He took a deep breath as he waited for young Black to answer the door. Over the years, he had found it necessary to offer his heartfelt apologies before, but he again felt truly ashamed of his behavior and wondered how old he would be before he finally learned his lesson.

Harry opened the portrait entrance and raised an eyebrow. "Headmaster," he said with careful civility, "what brings you to my quarters?"

"Mr. Black," the older wizard responded, "may I come in and speak with you?"

The raven-haired teen hesitated only an instant then stood aside and ushered the Headmaster into the room. Albus heaved a sigh of relief; perhaps his actions hadn't caused an irreconcilable breach.

"Please take a seat, Headmaster," Harry said with remote politeness. "May I offer you refreshments?"

"No thank you, my boy," Albus responded as he sat by the fireplace. He noticed a slight flinch at calling the young man "my boy" and wondered if perhaps his normal way of speaking was too familiar for his other world guest. He made an effort to meet the teen's green eyes and dove into the purpose for his visit.

"I made two very large errors in the last few days and both of them directly impacted you, Mr. Black. It was rude and disrespectful of me to ask a house elf what you had purchased in an attempt to determine how many galleons you had spent. I should have come directly to you to ask how you had managed to go from no resources to being able to equip yourself. I have no excuse for that invasion of your privacy and am sincerely ashamed that I somehow never gave a thought to it before I acted so reprehensively. If you would like, I will even give you my wizard's oath that I will speak to you rather than go around you in the future."

The young man was looking at him with both eyebrows raised, as if astonished that Albus would actually admit to his errors and

apologize. He wasn't sure how to take the reaction, but took another deep breath.

"In the same way, I would like to apologize for not informing you that Lucius Malfoy is the Minister of Magic in our world. When you admitted your likelihood of hexing the man, I thought it might be more beneficial to let you get used to being in an alternate world where not everyone was the same as they were in your world. I also believed that you would read about his election in your perusal of our newspapers. It never occurred to me that you might actually encounter him with no preparation. It wasn't a deliberate omission on my part or for those in the Order, but more a desire to help you acclimate yourself to this world. However, you were caught unaware, uncomfortably so, and I offer my sincere apology for that as well."

The younger man sat down abruptly, staring at the Headmaster in surprise and disbelief. His world's Albus Dumbledore would never have apologized so completely, nor would have offered a wizard's oath not to repeat the offense. Finally, he shook his head and said, "I thank you for the apology Headmaster. If you promise it won't happen again, I will trust you to keep your word." He met the other man's eyes and added, "If that trust is broken, you will find it is unlikely to ever be granted again."

Albus allowed some of the tension to ease from his frame. He had been sincerely ashamed of his violation of young Black's privacy and would have understood if the young man had been unwilling to forgive him. Teenagers often felt things so very strongly, after all. "Thank you, Mr. Black. I understand our misgivings." He continued, "I also wanted to let you know that the parents...well, the wizarding parents of the children that summoned you were appalled that they had not thought of helping you re-equip yourself, and will have the children deposit half of their allowances into your vault over the next several months to do so."

Harry arched an eyebrow before responding, "If it is part of the punishment that the parents wish to give their children, then I will of course acquiesce. However, if it's for any other purpose, there is no need."

Albus smiled as he said, "I believe it was a combination of the two; they felt it would make more of an impact than writing an essay

about what they had done, but it was also to provide you with some assistance."

"You'll find that I'm a fairly resourceful person, Headmaster," Harry said neutrally. "There are many safe and legal ways to earn gold if one knows where to look."

The older wizard gave a small smile, "I don't suppose now would be a good time to ask how you earned the funds to purchase your new belongings?"

Harry snorted and replied, "Perhaps later, Headmaster."

"May I ask another question, Mr. Black?"

Harry raised an eyebrow and nodded somewhat reluctantly, albeit curiously.

"Even before my own...misconduct...you seemed to have reservations about me." Harry's face quickly lost all expression. "I wondered if my counterpart in your world had offended you in some manner."

Harry stood and moved over to the fireplace where a small fire alleviated the winter chill and cast dancing shadows into the sitting room. He leaned on the mantle and stared at the flames as his mind raced through the years of memories. With his back still to the older wizard he took a deep breath, releasing it slowly before turning back around to face the Headmaster.

"Your counterpart was a controlling manipulator who treated people like pawns on a chess board rather than human beings. He sacrificed whoever was necessary if it was for what he perceived as being better for the good of the many. Of course, those sacrifices always seemed to be made by others, but that's beside the point. As Headmaster, he did nothing to stop the inter-house rivalries and even encouraged them when he permitted a House to believe they had won the House Cup only to award last minute points and take it away from them in front of the entire school." Harry recognized that the older wizard appeared uncomfortable, but continued relentlessly.

"He permitted me to be ostracized and ridiculed by the entire school more than once while doing nothing to stop the slander and rumors.

He forced me to compete in the Tri-Wizard Tournament, even though someone else had entered my name. He hired incompetent teachers and either was incapable of expending the energy to find better or didn't care enough about the students to do so. He permitted at least one staff member to mentally and emotionally abuse the students under his care and did nothing but chide the abuser gently for his behaviors."

Harry took another deep breath and again released it slowly, trying to let the anger seep from his body. "Did I have a problem with your counterpart? Yes, I most certainly did. When I was young and naïve, I loved and trusted him completely, more than any other person I had ever met. I fully believed the kindly grandfather persona he projected. I didn't think anyone could be better than Albus Dumbledore, which made the revelation of his numerous manipulations over the years even more brutal and hurtful. Oh yes, I had problems with your counterpart after learning just how badly he had betrayed my trust."

There was a long pause broken only by the crackling of the fire. Finally Albus uttered remorsefully, "I sincerely regret that the Headmaster of any school would not put the safety and education of his students before all else. I am even sorrier that my recent actions would reinforce the belief that he and I are alike. I can only hope that my future actions will diminish those concerns."

Harry looked at the elderly man who regarded him with earnest blue eyes. "I hope so as well, Headmaster. I sincerely hope so as well."

Harry glared at Rolanda Hooch as she teased him about the starry-eyed looks many of the female students were giving him over lunch. "I'm going to have to ask Professor Snape to teach me how to glare them into fearful submission," he muttered.

To his left, he heard the Potions Master murmur "It is something you must be born with, Mr. Black."

"Huh?" said Sirius Black on the other side of Snape. "What do I need to be born with?"

"One might infer acumen and shrewdness might have been lost in the annals of your family," replied the Potions Master with a smirk.

The DADA professor stared at the other man and shook his head. "I'm sure I was just insulted," he muttered.

Harry chuckled and forgot his own woes in watching the interplay between those two.

"What are your plans for the afternoon, Harry," asked the Flight Instructor as they finished their meals and stood to leave. "There are no Quidditch matches and I don't think you have any NEWT classes to audit."

"I was thinking of exploring the castle a little more," he responded. With her injunction to have fun ringing in his ears, Harry used some of the secret passages to avoid the mooning female students as he returned to his quarters. Once there, he picked up the bag containing rooster feathers and practiced transfiguring them into living specimens. He had decided that an enormous living basilisk in the bowels of the castle was too dangerous, especially one that was willing to eat students if so directed, and had decided to try to eliminate the danger before it became necessary. However, instead of trying to fight the massive creature with a sword as he did at twelve years old, he was planning to use a safer method and intended to conjure roosters that would crow.

Once classes were in session and the hallways were empty, he headed to the second floor girl's loo. Closing the door behind him, he cast a series of notice-me-not charms on the door, to ensure there were no girls in the restroom when he returned. None of them needed that embarrassment.

"Open" he hissed to the snake etched into the tap, and the entire fixture obediently sank into the ground, revealing the dark and musty-smelling entrance. With the additional commands of "stairs" and "lights", Harry made his way into the passageway. He walked past the location where he had found the massive shed skin and continued through the tunnel. He recognized the area where Lockhart caused a cave-in in his world, and proceeded cautiously with one eye on the ceiling in case it was unstable. Eventually, he found himself before the massive doors guarded by a complex locking device using two metal snakes.

"Open" he commanded again, and with a grinding rumble of long unused machinery, the snakes twisted and turned to unlock the

great doors. The opening of the door caused the torches to light within the massive temple-like Chamber and Harry experienced a sense of déjà vu as he entered; remembering how frightened he had been when he had come to rescue Ginny Weasley. From where he stood at the end of the long chamber, he could easily see the towering stone pillars entwined with more carved serpents that rose to support the ceiling. As he drew level with the last pair of pillars, he could see the enormous statue of Salazar Slytherin along the back wall. It still seemed as huge as it did when he was twelve; an image of an ancient wizard with a long beard that rivaled or even exceeded Dumbledore's beard. He walked to the huge stone feet just barely visible below the stone robe and scattered two of the rooster feathers.

Stepping back towards the opposite wall, he continued to drop feathers until he reached the other side of the chamber. He drew his wand and then loudly hissed, "Speak to me Slytherin, greatest of Hogwarts Four!"

As had happened when Riddle's teenaged diary memory had said those Parseltongue words, Slytherin's gigantic stone face began to move. The statue's mouth slowly opened wide, the jaw dropping to create a gaping cavity into another compartment of the Chamber, too hidden in shadows to perceive what lay within. His heart beat faster as something stirred within the statue's mouth, then he heard it – scales upon stone as something massive slithered towards the opened mouth. Instinctively, Harry dropped his eyes to avoid the basilisk's deadly gaze.

He saw the enormous black-scaled body reach the floor and its huge jaws opened, revealing deadly fangs as the head swung around. To his surprise he heard, "Isss the ssschool in danger? Who daresss attack Hogwartsss?"

"Iss that your purposse," he responded in surprise, "to protect the sschool?"

The head swung back in his direction. "I wasss hatched and raissed to protect the sschool and the sstudentss, although no one hass called on me for many yearss." The basilisk paused and seemed to evaluate him. "Who are you that you sspeak the language of ssnakes? Are you desscended from the Sslytherin line?"

Harry considered his choices and decided on honesty with the great beast. It had not attacked and didn't seem to be as hostile as the one that had nearly killed him. "I wass once a Hogwartss sstudent. Now I help the Flying Insstructor. I do not think I am related to Ssalazar Sslytherin, but it hass been one thoussand yearss ssince he walked the sschool hallss."

The basilisk moved until it was fully into the Chamber. The torches caused additional colors to dance among his scales, bringing dark green and even a purple eggplant color to shimmer among the black scales. "Ssso long," it mused. It suddenly stopped and seemed to sniff the air and then looked down at the ground, sniffing delicately. The massive head turned back towards Harry. "Did you come to kill me, human? I ssmell the scent of roossterss."

Harry tightened the grip on his wand, but the basilisk did not move closer to him. "I thought I might have to."

The great beast cocked its' head at him. "Why?" it questioned.

"I...Oh bollocks..I am not from this world. My world iss like thiss one, but elssewhere. In my world, an evil sstudent took control of the bassilissk in that chamber and ssent it to kill the sstudentss in the sschool. He wanted to kill all but the pureblood sstudentss."

Harry jumped when the basilisk reared up. "What? That iss impossible! We are here to protect!" Its' great body began writhing in agitation as the tail whipped back and forth, stirring up great clouds of dust. "Did thiss other bassilissk harm any sstudentss?"

"Many were petrified, but that wass because they ssaw your eyess...or the eyess of the other... reflected in water or through a lenss. They were revived with a potion."

"Wass the evil wizard vanquissed? Did my other sself return to normal afterwardss?"

Harry used his free hand to run his hand through his hair. He didn't think this would be accepted well. "Um...I came into the Chamber and the evil wizard, who was also a parsselmouth, ordered your other sself to kill me. I had to fight back. I had a ssword and drove it up through itss mouth and into the brain, killing it."

There was a long moment of silence and the thrashing tail slowly stopped. "You musst have been right in her mouth at the time."

"Her?" Harry thought. The basilisk was female? "Yess, I wass," he admitted.

"And the evil wizard?" the basilisk questioned.

"It wass actually a memory sstored in a book. It wass draining another sstudent'ss life to come back to life itsself. One of your other sself'sss fangss broke off in my arm, and I drove that fang into the book, which killed the sspirit."

The great head waved back and forth, as if thinking. "A sspirit living in a book that could drain the life of a sstudent? Only an evil ritual could causse ssuch a thing." The head stopped and he thought the creature was staring at him. "You did well to kill both." It slithered forwards a few feet and then paused again. "How many sseasonss were you when thiss happened?"

"I wass twelve," Harry confessed.

The great body rose up again in shock. "A hatchling! A sstudent and a hatchling! Evil! No one sshould harm a hatchling!" The hissing was greatly agitated.

"Shhh, calm yoursself Great One," Harry soothed. "I ssurvived."

"Shasanae," the basilisk responded. At Harry's puzzled silence, she added, "My name is Shasanae."

"My name is Harry Potter," he replied and then wondered if he should try to explain that he was using another name.

"Harry Potter," the basilisk repeated. "Harry Potter, you may look at me. I have closed my inner lid. You are in no danger."

Harry gathered his Gryffindor bravery and slowly raised his eyes. He could see a slight film seemed to cover her yellow eyes, but he felt no impact from her otherwise deadly eyes. "Thank you, Shasanae."

"You sspeak the language of ssnakes and even have the sscent of a bassilissk around you, although it iss massked under the odor of the roosstersss. How did you ssurvive the venom when you were bitten?"

"A phoenix cried into the wound," he disclosed. "I wouldn't have ssurvived otherwisse." He thought about it and then added, "I wass in the outer chamber a few weekss ago, and took one of your sshed sskinss. I had ssome armor made from it."

The deadly head tilted to one side. "A wisse idea," she seemed quite pleased with the idea. "My race iss very ressisstant to damage."

"Shasanae, if the casstle had been in danger, could only a parsselmouth releasse you? Do you even want to be contained here?"

"If the casstle were in danger, the portraitss would know. One of them would have awakened me. Ass for being held here, I hibernate most of the time ssince there was no one with whom to sspeak. If you will come sspeak to me, I will not ssleep again immediately."

Harry thought over what she said. If a portrait would awaken her, then it would also have to be a parselmouth. "Do you have a portrait of Ssalazar Sslytherin in your chamber? I didn't think any portraitss of the Founderss exissted!"

Shasanae hissed a laugh. "I do have a portrait of Ssalazar, man-child. I will introduce you. Perhapss you can bring the portrait out into the Chamber." The notion seemed to amuse the great creature. "I never told him how hiss grandsson Sservius completed what Ssalazar sstarted. Ssalazar would never have permitted such an osstentatiouss sstatue to be built of him, but Sservius wass always a pompouss hatchling." She turned back towards the statue's mouth. "Come, Harry Potter."

He had to grab his Gryffindor courage with both hands and force himself to join the basilisk. He still remembered those fangs snapping at him and puncturing his flesh down to the bone. She seemed to feel his unease, as she had the audacity to wink at him. He grumbled about cheeky basilisks as he followed her into a chamber about half the size of the Great Hall. Together they crossed the room to where a portrait rested high on the wall.

Harry stared at the portrait in wonder; here was one of the actual Founders of Hogwarts! The sleeping man didn't look like a haughty and self-indulged spoiled brats so often found in Slytherin, but neither did he resemble the sculptured image out front. The ancient statue was of an old wizened man, while the portrait depicted a man in his prime with smooth raven-colored hair that pooled around his shoulders. His skin was somewhat pale, as though he spent more time indoors than out in the sun. He had a strong jaw line and thin lips set in a perpetual smirk. He was dressed in hunter green robes embroidered with silver runes.

"Waken, Masster Ssalazar" called the basilisk. "A Ssspeaker is here".

The portrait blinked, revealing deep green eyes, although they were round while Harry's own emerald eyes were almond-shaped. Thin lips stretched to reveal pearl-white teeth while retaining the smirk. The deep green eyes narrowed slightly as the portrait inspected the teenaged wizard, with such a penetrating stare that Harry was reminded of Snape using Legilimency.

The portrait's eyes moved over to the basilisk and an elegant eyebrow rose. "Why do you bring a sstranger to me, Shasanae?"

The great beast slithered forward across the floor until she was within touching distance to the portrait. A faint and nearly transparent luminosity spread between them that lasted for several long seconds. As the light faded away, Salazar turned his eyes back towards Harry and a smile played upon his lips.

"I must admit that entertaining a visitor from another world, especially one capable of defeating an ancient basilisk at a mere two and ten years whilst surviving the venom was worth being awakened." He examined Harry again with an intense scrutiny. "Tell me, Mr. Harry Potter, how did you come into this world?"

Harry spent the next twenty minutes explaining how he arrived in this world, which prompted the Founder to question Harry's role in his own world. To say the portrait was chagrined at finding a descendent of his had been willing to murder children was a tremendous understatement. Harry stood in awed silence as the man fluently cursed Tom Riddle in a variety of languages that

included imaginative punishments which were surely physically impossible, even with Transfiguration.

Once the tirade ran down, the Salazar looked at the teen and asked, "This Lord Slytherin in this world, is not quite as loathsome as the Voldemort in your own?"

"To be honest, I'm not sure sir," Harry admitted. "His actions are much more subtle, and he never found the Chamber here or set Shasanae on the students. While I am still researching, it appears his actions have been more political in nature, but there seems to be an underground terrorist movement targeting muggle-borns and half-bloods."

Salazar considered the young man in front of him again before saying, "What were you going to do once you killed Shasanae?"

Harry looked down at the floor and shifted nervously. Now that he knew the basilisk was no danger to the students, he was embarrassed that he had planned to kill her. "Err...I was going to drain her venom sacs and sell it," he confessed. "Maybe hire someone to render...the remains." He avoided looking at the basilisk, which caused the portrait to smirk in amusement.

"I am pleased to perceive that you hold some small measure of cleverness, Mr. Potter." Harry blinked, wondering whether the portrait had complimented him or not. "I propose a covenant, young speaker. You will relocate my portrait from this chamber to your quarters so that together we may research the one who calls himself Lord Slytherin. Shasanae will permit you to milk her venom so that you may acquire the pecuniary resources necessary to subsidize your endeavors."

After twenty minute of negotiations, in which included Salazar agreeing to mentor Harry in the Potions, Runic magic and Wards, as well as permit Harry to document the Founding of Hogwarts from Salazar's perspective, the pact was made. Harry filled the impervious flasks he had brought with the basilisk venom. If the Apothecary was correct, one liter was worth over 26 thousand galleons.

He carefully dislodged the portrait, and following Salazar's terse instructions, he shrunk it to the size of his hand. He transfigured a

stone to a leather strap, and hung the portrait from it, then tied the strip of leather around his neck. This allowed the portrait to hang against his chest and see what Harry could see.

"Shassanae, if you are hungry, there iss an Acromantula nessesst in the Forbidden Foresst." At her eager agreement, Harry gave her directions to the colony of spiders that he and Ron Weasley had barely escaped in their Second Year. She slithered off down a side tunnel that Salazar confirmed led to a hidden exit outside of the castle.

"Is there anything you want me to take from here before we leave, sir" asked Harry.

"No, this chamber was merely Shasanae's refuge. However, let us see how the centuries have treated the remainder my retreat. Return to the main Chamber, young Speaker, and move to the far back wall." Once out in the main Chamber, Harry was treated to another several minute tirade on whoever had completed the Chamber after his death. This included teaching Harry necromancy so that he could raise the guilty only to torture them to death. The tirade only stopped when Harry began snickering at the portrait.

Finally moving to the far wall, Harry followed the portrait's instructions until he reached a section of the wall that held an inlaid snake engraving. "Open Study," hissed the portrait. Immediately, the snake receded into the wall, which shimmered briefly before an ornate wooden door appeared.

At Harry's sudden inhale, the portrait smirked, "Did you imagine I created this haven just for Shasanae? There were times when all of us wished for the tranquility of a private retreat. I am certain that Godric, Helga and Rowena all fashioned their own hidden sanctuaries within the castle."

Harry entered and couldn't withhold his gasp of amazement and excitement while Salazar grumbled at the sight before them. The dust-coated room was a richly appointed library full of shelves. One wall was filled with tightly rolled scrolls that had never been modified into book form.

"I should have bestowed a standing order for the Hogwarts house elves to maintain these chambers," muttered Salazar, eying the

accumulated grime with distaste. "As you can ascertain, this was my study and private library where I conducted my research or simply retreated for quietude. I kept my more treasured tomes here; if indeed a millennia has passed, many may be unknown to this time."

"The Headmaster and professors would probably sell their souls to have access to this," Harry murmured in awe. "I am afraid to touch anything, in case it crumbles from age."

"I cast impermeable spells on all materials here, but it would be prudent to ensure the charms have continued before attempting to open anything. We will return another day once I have had time to consider the most advantageous approach," decided Salazar.

"I also built a potions lab as well as a bed chamber down here," revealed the portrait. "The potions lab had a sealed cabinet enchanted to keep ingredients fresh. When we return, we will investigate to see how those charms endured as well. For now, if you go through the door on your left, the tunnel will bring you to the main Hogwarts kitchen."

At Salazar's command, Harry ordered "Lights" once he was in the black tunnel, and crystal orbs embedded in the wall lit up with a luminescence. "I am pleased to see that enchantment continues," remarked the portrait smugly. "My spell used the ambient magic of the castle to charge the orbs."

As Harry followed the tunnel upwards, he couldn't help but think about Voldemort. "In my world, Tom Riddle desperately wanted prestige and acclaim. He could have had it all if he had simply revealed the finding of the Chamber of Secrets to the wizarding world, even if he had secreted away some key books for himself. And yet he didn't. Instead, he kept it all secret and hoarded the knowledge. It could have been the crowning achievement of his Hogwarts years, something that no one else had been able to discover over the centuries. He would have been admired and honored by the scholars and lay people alike, but he let the opportunity pass him by, just to gloat over his private knowledge. I wonder if he had already begun his slide into insanity even as a teenager."

"Perhaps his goal to have more knowledge than others surpassed his goal for public acclaim," suggested the portrait.

Harry sighed and agreed. "I suppose we'll never know."

Before they entered the kitchen, Harry slipped the portrait into a pocket rather than reveal it to all of the house elves. He was greeted enthusiastically by the energetic little creatures, but declined any refreshments. He returned to his quarters, enlarged the portrait and set it above the fireplace so that Salazar could see the sitting room, which was where Harry did most of his work.

"In case Shasanae is spotted in the Forest, I thought I should let the Headmaster know she is a castle guardian so that no one attacks her. What are your thoughts?" he asked Salazar.

"I would grieve if she or someone that encountered her was harmed," agreed the portrait. "I will defer to your knowledge of this time period."

After some consideration, Harry decided to inform the Headmaster. He still didn't trust the man, but he had apologized for invading Harry's privacy, which his own Dumbledore would never have done – at least not with any degree of sincerity.

"Open in Salazar's name" he hissed to the gargoyle guarding the stairs to the Headmaster's office. Salazar had informed him that all warded areas had been keyed to that phrase in his time. The teen was pleased to see the gargoyle immediately jump aside; apparently no one had reset those hidden passwords. The door to the Headmaster's office was open when he arrived at the landing, and he found James Potter, Sirius Black and Severus Snape inside. He was amazed that James and Sirius were speaking quietly while the Potions Master was reading a journal and that there were no wands out. They all turned to look at him when he coughed softly.

"Good evening, Mr. Black," said Severus smoothly. "Albus will return shortly; he is escorting a guest. Would you like to wait or leave a message for him?"

Harry grinned mischievously at the idea of Albus hearing about his news second hand, especially from the snarky Potions Master. "Certainly, thank you. I wanted to let the Headmaster know that

Salazar Slytherin left a basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets to guard the school in time of danger." Severus nodded once; the teen had already revealed that he had been bitten by a basilisk in his world; he had already wondered about there being one in this world. "It had been in hibernation, but is awake again. It's currently in the Forbidden Forest looking to cull the Acromantula colony a little."

He ignored the gasps from James and Sirius, and walked over to Severus. He withdrew a small vial from his pocket and handed it to the Potions Master who eyed it with interest. "I thought you might be able to use basilisk venom in some potions." At the slight flaring of the man's nostrils, he knew he was right.

"Basilisk? Wait, what do you mean there is a basilisk guarding the school," asked Sirius in a high-pitched voice. He suddenly coughed and lowered his voice to a more manly register. "How did you know about it?"

Harry turned back towards the other two men, both of whom were staring at him with horror as if he was a new frightening species they had never seen before. "In my world, Tom Riddle found the Chamber of Secrets and bound the basilisk to his service. In this world, he apparently never found the Chamber or basilisk." Harry smiled and added, "Which is a huge benefit for our side."

"But how did you get its venom," said Sirius shaking his head. "It's not like you could just ask. Their eyes are deadly!"

Harry grinned again; this should be interesting. "Actually, I just asked her for it and she politely acquiesced."

James shook his head and stared at the young man, "What do you mean you asked her? Basilisks can speak English?"

"No, I speak parseltongue," Harry admitted cheerfully.

His good nature disappeared as both James and Sirius immediately recoiled from him as if he had just calmly announced himself to be a cannibal. Severus remained seated, watching the interplay with narrowed eyes, ready to step in if wands were drawn.

"You're a parselmouth?" James spit the words out as if they were polluting his mouth.

Harry looked at the two horrified men and then shook his head in disbelief. "I see. You're as narrow-minded and prejudiced as the Blood Purists; you just make the conscious decision to discriminate on an inherited ability to speak a foreign language while they discriminate based on parentage."

"Now Mr. Black," began Severus in an attempt to diffuse the situation.

Harry cut him off with an abrupt gesture. "No Professor. I will not be patient with such blatant and intolerant bigotry. I didn't fight a war and nearly die only to be kidnapped and reviled by those as small-minded as Voldemort." The other men flinched at the icy denunciation in his voice. The teen turned and stalked from the room, his magic swirling around him.

Two men watched from down the hallway as the figure of a young man stalked away from the Headmaster's office, fury evident in his posture. "Oh dear," said Albus. "I wonder what that was about."

They continued up the stairs to the Headmaster's office. Albus entered the room with Peter Pettigrew to see Severus arguing fiercely with James and Sirius. Peter whistled sharply to get their attention. "What is all the commotion about and who was the young man who stomped out in a rage?"

"Peter! Welcome back!" exclaimed James. "You won't believe what what's been happening while you were away!"

"You, me, fire whiskey tonight," said Sirius, giving a one-armed hug to his old friend.

Severus inclined his head, "Pettigrew." He received an equally neutral "Snape" and a nod in return.

"So who was the young man that left and why did you look like you had been hit by a wide-eyed charm when I came in?"

"That's Harrison Black. The kids summoned him...supposedly from another world just like ours as a champion or hero." They paused to give a brief recap of the young man's actions since he was brought to their world. "But we just learned..." began Sirius.

"The boy is a Parselmouth!" exclaimed James with horror dripping from his voice. Albus looked surprised and then thoughtful, as he contemplated the boy's history and the implications of the disclosure.

The smaller man looked at his two old friends and frowned. "That's it? You're acting like he kicked you in the family jewels, despoiled your sister and stole your last knut because he can speak to snakes?"

James looked at him oddly. "All you can say is 'that's it'? We've just discovered that the so-called hero is Dark and he's in a school full of children! Associating with MY children!"

"Wait James, let me make sure I understand correctly. You consider him to be a Dark wizard and unworthy to associate with your children because he can talk to reptiles?" Peter clarified.

"Peter, what's wrong with you?" asked Sirius angrily. "Being a Parselmouth is a Dark ability!"

Severus was surprised that the other two men hadn't heard or heeded the warning tone in Pettigrew's voice as the smaller man continued softly, "And you both believe that if a wizard has any 'dark' ability or characteristics, then he should be avoided and ostracized from polite society?"

James and Sirius nodded, although they took a step back at the seething anger forming on their friend's round face. Severus Snape smirked and wondered from where Pettigrew had inherited his Slytherin characteristics.

In icy tones that would have made an abominable snowman proud, Peter sneered, "Might I remind you two that one of our best friends was a werewolf, a so-called Dark creature! And that 'dark creature' gave up his life to protect your son, James? Have you ever learned the definition of hypocrisy?" His smaller figure crackled with energy as an unseen wind shifted his robes. "For the first time in my life, I am utterly ashamed of both of you! I am disgusted that you would condemn a teenager simply because he speaks another language. A Dark ability my arse...you magic-forsaken hypocrites! You dare revile that boy when our own brother was a Dark creature!" His lips curled in revulsion and the windows abruptly shattered with the

strength of his fury. With the merest nod of apology to the Headmaster, he stormed out of the office, slamming the door behind him.

James and Sirius looked at each other in shock and dawning horror.

Albus repaired the broken windows and then sat down in his chair, removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes tiredly. "Would one of you explain precisely what happened to cause two men, one a guest in this castle and the other an Order member, to storm out of my office?"

Lord Slytherin signed his name with a flourish and waved a hand, automatically drying the ink on the parchment. He laid it to one side, on the stack of completed work. "Who knew that assuming the mantle of nobility would involve so much paperwork," he muttered to himself.

He stood and moved to the beautifully engraved cabinet behind him, and withdrew a bottle of Absinthe and a glass. He poured himself a small glass of the potent green liquor and returned to his seat. He sipped it slowly, savoring the faint anise flavor. He felt a brief increase in mental awareness, and looked at the remaining sheaf of papers that had to be read.

To his relief, a quiet knock on his study door heralded a welcome interruption. "Enter", he called out. A hooded man opened the door and stood just inside with respect until he was motioned forward. "Come and sit down, Charles. I presume you have learned all that I asked?"

"Yes, my Lord. It took some time though." Charles realized that his Lord was looking at his hood, and quickly dropped it down. The man was a perfectionist when it came to etiquette, and his rebukes could be scathing. He withdrew a sheaf of papers from an inner pocket of his cloak and passed them across the desk.

"I will read them in detail later. A summary will do for now."

"The man that was summoned calls himself Harrison Black, but makes no claim to the Ancient and Noble House of Black. He was severely injured when he was summoned; near death in fact. He was in the Hogwarts Infirmary for quite some time, and left using a

cane. He is now seen without it at times, so his injuries may not be permanent."

The brown haired man paused to consider his words, "I overheard Sirius Black speaking with Auror Potter about how he is from a parallel world. The Auror was relieved that the young man didn't press charges against those that summoned him." He looked at the man across from him to judge his reaction to the news, but was disappointed to see only the normal neutral mask the Lord wore.

"Although he arrived with no resources, he managed to outfit himself with clothing, a wand, books and a trunk in Diagon Alley and paid in cash. He was seen entering an Armorer's shop, but the shop owner was unwilling to share any information." Charles frowned; he had offered quite a large bribe which was angrily refused before he was shown the door.

"In addition, he was given quarters in the castle and given permission to audit some classes in preparation for taking his NEWT exams here. Lastly, Healer Preston MacMillian addressed the staff after Black was injured; apparently in a mock duel with Sirius Black. We were told that young Black was under the Healer's care for – and I quote – the many traumatic events he endured. We were specifically warned not to subject the young man to any physical or magical attacks as it would impact his recovery."

Slytherin's head tilted and his dark eyes stared off at the wall as he considered the information. "What else?"

"He was the young hero identified in the Daily Oracle that helped defeat some vandals that were tearing up a shop opened by a half-blood. He defeated two and was chasing the third when an over-eager Auror sent a banishing spell at him, sending him to St. Mungo's. He received an apology from the Head Auror, who also escorted him to the Minister's office for a personal apology."

Slytherin chuckled coldly, "Yes, Lucius is not one to miss an opportunity." He gave a small smile to the man across from him. "Thank you, Charles."

Charles stood and bowed. "It is an honor to serve you, my Lord," he responded before quietly retreating from the room.

"Not part of the Ancient and Noble House of Black and then injured by the current Head of that House. Possibly in response to a perceived fraud to the Family? Reportedly summoned from a parallel world with no resources, but able to pay in gold for what he wanted. Planning to take his NEWTs, so either he wants an excuse to be in the castle, or he doesn't believe he will be able to return to his own world. Traumatized and seeing a Mind Healer, but still willing and able to fight vandals in defense of a half-blood shop owner." He sipped his Absinthe again. "I look forward to meeting this young man."

OoOoOoOo

Shasanae is pronounced Shaa-saa-nay, with the first two syllables drawn out.

Chapter 9 – Busted!

Harry moaned loudly, shattering the peaceful night and waking both Hedwig, who slept on a perch in her bonded's room as well as Salazar out in the sitting room. Hedwig leapt the short distance to Harry's headboard and rumbled softly in her chest as she watched the young man thrash within the sheets.

"I died for you and your mother, Harry," said a ghostly James Potter. "I gave up my life and for what? Did you take after me in Transfiguration or your mother in Charms? No, you became a Parselmouth. No Potter would forsake the Light to become a dark wizard!"

"But Dad," cried Harry, "I'm not a dark wizard! I couldn't help being a Parselmouth! It's not my fault!" His father only faded away, shaking his head in disappointment.

Another figure materialized near him. "Oh Harry, we had such plans for you," said Lily Potter sorrowfully. "We loved you so much and had such high expectations of you. But you never quite measured up, did you my son? You were always in trouble at Hogwarts, you didn't make many friends and you didn't even try your best in your classes. Such a disappointment."

"Mum! I tried! I really did! But I didn't understand the wizarding world at first. I didn't understand anything! The other students always expected me to be some type of super hero, but I was just Harry!"

The auburn-haired woman faded away without acknowledging him, only to be replaced by a seventeen year old Cedric Diggory. "You killed me, Harry. I tried to befriend you, and what did you do? Insisted I take the Cup with you, only to be immediately killed. How many more people did you kill, Harry?"

"No! Cedric, I'm so sorry! I didn't know the Cup was a portkey! I didn't know you would be killed!" Harry thought his heart would shatter under the accusations. Was he that bad of a son and friend?

Cedric turned his back on him and another sound drew Harry's attention. He twisted around to see Sirius, who looked at him mournfully. "You led me to my death, Pup. You refused to learn

Occlumency and let Voldemort trick you with false visions. You should have remembered the mirror. I wouldn't have died if you had only remembered the mirror. Instead, I came to save you from your mistakes, but you just led me to my death."

Harry crumbled to his knees, stretching his hand out to his godfather. "Sirius...I...I never wanted you to die. I would have gladly died in your place!"

"No excuses, Pup. You were a poor son; a poor student; a poor friend and a poor godson. In fact, you failed at everything, Harry. No godson of mine would have been a Parselmouth like a Slytherin. It's a good thing your parents didn't live to see how you turned out. They would have been ashamed of you."

The teen collapsed forward, his forehead hitting the cold stone floor. "I..I loved you, Sirius...."

"Harry," a cold voice said behind him. Harry closed his eyes in pain, but he touched his tongue to his dry lips before saying, "Ron..."

"Can't you even look at me, Harry? I fought beside you and what happened? Did my death mean anything? Or did you make my death meaningless?"

"Ron...", Harry's voice cracked in grief.

"Such a disappointment," said Lily.

"Not much of a Potter," added James.

Cedric's voice stated, "I have to wonder whether he planned for me to die by offering to take the cup together."

"He led me to my death, quite Slytherin of a Parselmouth, wouldn't you say?" Sirius' voice sneered.

"My best mate and he left me to die," whispered Ron.

Hedwig jumped down to the mattress near Harry's pillow and dodged his thrashing arms. She moved forward and bit his ear sharply. The teen shot up in bed, panting heavily, his hand grasping the wand he kept beneath his pillow, his eyes looking for the threat.

Hedwig barked at him in satisfaction and jumped into his lap, ignoring that his body was damp with sweat. Gradually, the teen's breathing slowed and he tentatively reached a hand to stroke the owl. He was rewarded with a rumble of pleasure as she butted his hand with her head, demanding scratches. His hand automatically scratched the spot behind her neck that she couldn't quite reach to preen, and she stretched out to give him better access.

Harry spent an hour stroking and scratching Hedwig before he showered and dressed. Then he sat in front of the fireplace and rubbed his eyes tiredly.

"A cup of chamomile tea, I think," said Salazar from above the fireplace, where he watched the young man with some concern.

"Maybe," replied Harry lethargically. He made no move to call a house elf, causing the portrait to frown. A shimmer of magic surrounded the portrait and Nebby popped into the room.

"Is Master Harry wanting his breakfast," asked the house elf with an eager smile. The smile began to droop as she read the weariness and defeat on the young man's face. From above the fireplace another voice commanded, "A cup of chamomile tea." Nebby looked up and her eyes widened to impossible proportions as she recognized the portrait of a Hogwarts Founder. "Immediately sir!" she responded with a low curtsy before popping out.

Within moments she was back with a steaming cup which she held before the dejected teen. She took one of his hands and wrapped it around the cup. A small smile of approval came when his other hand automatically wrapped around the other side of the cup, soaking up its warmth.

"Nebby added a few drops of honey, sir. Nebby is hearing that many witches and wizards like it prepared that way." At Harry's despondent nod, she clucked her tongue and disappeared again.

Harry sipped the tea slowly. The steeped mixture smelt of freshly cut apples and the few drops of honey added to the flavor. Slowly he released a shuddering sigh.

"Nightmares?" asked Salazar quietly.

"Almost every night," Harry said staring at the flames in the fireplace. "I haven't had this type of nightmare in a while though. Most of them have been about my stay in Club Voldemort...at least since I woke up in this world."

Not feeling qualified to handle a despondent teen, Salazar began talking about how his family and his life before joining with the other three to create Hogwarts. Slowly, Harry began listening to the story, becoming more interested until he started with surprise when the Floo flared green and Preston stepped out for their morning discussion.

"Preston!" Harry exclaimed. "I didn't realize how much time had passed." He looked at the portrait and gave it a wry grin, only to receive a satisfied smirk in return. "Allow me to present you to my new friend, Salazar Slytherin."

Preston looked up in surprise. "I didn't think there were any enchanted Founders portraits," he said with some awe, sketching a partial bow to the portrait.

"Indeed, we saw no advantage to maintain a visible presence in the school, almost certainly detracting from the new Headmasters and Headmistresses. Our time had come and gone, although we each do have a portrait hidden away in case the time arises that we are needed. Mr. Black simply happened across mine."

"Preston knows about the Chamber and the fact that I was born Harry Potter," the teen supplied quickly. He's a Mind Healer who's been helping me."

"Then I will retire and give you your privacy," Salazar responded and walked out of his frame, heading to an unknown destination.

"Salazar was keeping me distracted," admitted the teen looking at Preston. He called for Nebby who brought a pot of tea and some warm scones. Harry filled Preston's cup first and then refilled his own mug.

"Chamomile," sighed Preston appreciatively. "I haven't had it for a while."

"Salazar suggested it after I woke up from a nightmare this morning." Harry stared into his mug and shook his head.

"Would you like to tell me about it?"

The teen shrugged, his shoulders slightly slumped. "I saw my parents, and Cedric and Sirius and Ron. They all blamed me for their deaths, or for not measuring up to their expectations." His eyes again reflected the pain of that dream.

Preston waited, letting Harry gather his thoughts. As the silence continued, he probed, "What happened yesterday?"

"I went down to the Chamber of Secrets. I didn't want Lord Slytherin to get control of the basilisk like Voldemort did in my world. I was going to conjure roosters to kill her....although I didn't know it was a 'her' at the time." He took a sip of the tea, reflecting on the day. "The basilisk was intended to be a protector of the school. After we talked a bit, she took me into her chamber to meet Salazar." He nodded towards the now empty portrait. "Salazar was bored and had me bring him here."

"After I did, I went to see the Headmaster, to let him know the basilisk was out hunting Acromantulas in the Forbidden Forest. I didn't want anyone to panic on seeing her. He wasn't there, but Auror Potter and Professors Black and Snape were there. Snape offered to relay a message, so I told them about the basilisk and Professor Black wanted to know how I knew so much. I explained that she told me. The knowledge that I was a Parselmouth was...not well received," he said flatly.

Harry shook his head. "Why in Merlin's name did I admit I was a Parselmouth to them? I should have known what the reaction would be after Second Year when everyone turned on me. I don't know what I was thinking. For some reason, I was just looking forward to seeing their surprise."

"I see," said Preston quietly. "Harry, the Oblivious Unction potion doesn't just help heal recent traumas, it also dulls the feelings you had around distressing memories from other times in your life. It's a tool to help the mind heal most of the harrowing experiences the patient has experienced."

Harry groaned and shook his head. "I should have realized that. We did discuss it; I just didn't realize exactly how it was going to affect me. I only thought they would be surprised. I didn't expect the vehement reaction they had."

"Especially not from the image of your father and godfather."

"Yeah, that too." He snorted and added, "Snape wasn't upset at it at all; he just seemed curious. But James...he seemed to think it marked me as a dark wizard, and Sirius backed him up. Bloody hell, Preston, I haven't done a single 'dark' thing since I've been here. They bloody kidnapped me, and I didn't press charges. I went out of my way to help innocents in Diagon Alley and what happens? They call me dark! Oh hell, I can never live up to anyone's expectations, no matter what world I'm in!"

"Then why do you try," asked the Healer gently.

The teen gave him a half-hearted glare, but responded, "Because the Dursleys trained me from childhood to believe that acceptance was based on my performance. Yes, you've helped me understand that Preston. It doesn't mean I can just stop behaving the way I've behaved for the last nineteen years!"

The older man took another sip of his tea. "Harry, do you believe that speaking to snakes is inherently evil?"

"No, that's just stupid. It's not any different than learning Mermish – well, other than Mermish can be learned and Parseltongue can't really be taught."

"So it's just a stereotype?"

"Well, yeah, I guess."

"Like Gryffindors are brave and reckless, and Ravenclaws are bookworms, and Slytherins are evil, and Hufflepuffs...what was the stereotype you told me about?"

"Hufflepuffs are loyal , but duffers," Harry admitted a bit embarrassed.

"So for whatever reason, James and Sirius knew of a parselmouth stereotype and accepted it as true. Sounds like ignorance to me."

Harry gave him a weak grin. "I told them they were as narrow-minded and bigoted as the Blood Purists, only their discrimination was based on the ability to speak a language, and then I stormed out."

Preston chuckled and said "Good for you!" He was secretly pleased that his patient had regained enough self-confidence to stand up for himself, even if his anxieties manifested in his dreams. He would accept whatever progress they could make.

Harry sat next to the Potions Master at lunch, as far away from Sirius Black as he could get. He refused to even glance at the man, not wanting to see disgust on the features of the man who mimicked his beloved godfather. Fortunately, the DADA instructor was engaged in a conversation with the round-faced Muggle Studies professor.

"I am pleased to see you, Mr. Black," said Severus quietly. "I wanted to thank you again for the gift of the basilisk venom. I intend to use it in a variety of antidotes. Being one of the most virulent venoms in existence, it will be beneficial with developing antidotes to weaker poisons and venoms."

"You're welcome, Professor," responded Harry neutrally. After his discussion with Preston, he felt better about the reaction to his revelation of being a Parselmouth.

"I must admit to being very interested in the Chamber," confessed Severus. "Perhaps you would permit me to accompany you one day?"

Harry smiled briefly although there was no amusement in his eyes. "You aren't afraid to be in the presence of an evil dark Parselmouth, Professor?"

"You forget that I am a Slytherin, Mr. Black and that the snake is my House's emblem. Speaking Parseltongue is an inherited ability and one to be respected. I am capable of seeing how it could be particularly valuable in numerous circumstances. Pray do not associate me with those dunderheads."

Harry gave the Potions Master a small, but grateful smile. "I will speak with Shasanae about including you in a visit, then."

The black-clad man inclined his head appreciatively.

As Harry left the Great Hall through the staff door, the Headmaster called to him. Harry courteously waited in the hallway for the older man to catch up to him.

"Do you have a class to audit at the moment, Mr. Black?" the elderly wizard asked.

"No, Headmaster. I was merely going to the library."

Albus smiled at the younger man over his glasses. "Would you walk with me then?"

Harry reined in his impatience and inclined his head, matching his steps to the Headmaster's.

"I would like to offer my own apologies for the situation that occurred yesterday in my office," the other man began. He noticed Harry's flinch, but continued, "I was accompanying Peter Pettigrew when we saw you stalking away. James and Sirius explained their unease with your ability to speak Parseltongue. Peter was extremely displeased with their behavior and rebuked them quite effectively. I added my own displeasure after I heard the entire story as well."

Harry had turned to glare at Albus when he mentioned Pettigrew, but then stopped walking entirely when he heard that Peter had stood up for him. "Wait, you're telling me that Peter Pettigrew championed me?"

Albus stopped and smiled at the stunned young man. "He was furious, actually. James and Sirius had forgotten that one of their former best friends was a werewolf and therefore a 'dark' creature. If they could condemn you, then they were condemning him as well. He told them he was ashamed of them and left after blowing out the windows in my office." He began walking again and after several steps, heard Harry hurrying after him.

"You're speaking of Remus Lupin? He was my DADA teacher in my Third Year at Hogwarts, but I read that he died here."

Albus smiled in surprise, "Was he? How marvelous! I was grieved when he died so young. Was he a good teacher?"

"One of the very best," Harry said softly. His throat caught suddenly as a wave of homesickness washed over him and he missed Remus acutely.

Albus noticed the sudden grief the young man displayed, so waited several moments before he said, "I also wanted to thank you for warning me about the basilisk hunting in the Forbidden Forest. I wasn't aware that that Slytherin had left such a formidable guardian for the school, although I recall you mentioning fighting one in your early Hogwarts years."

"Voldemort controlled her in my world. I didn't want to take the chance of someone doing the same here and planned to kill her, only to discover that she was incensed that her counterpart had harmed a student. She had no problem with non-purebloods being in the school."

"Indeed," said a fascinated Albus. "It is a shame that we have lost so much knowledge over the centuries. Perhaps you will permit me to accompany you to the Chamber one of these days?"

Harry couldn't help but smile. "The Potions Master made the same request. I will ask Shasanae." 'And Salazar,' he thought, 'I wonder if he would be willing to speak with either Albus or Snape'.

Harry sat in a secluded corner of the Library with a variety of History and Law books around him. His research into this world had become more focused in to the political and legal aspects, as the Blood Purists weren't the visible terrorists that the Death Eaters had been in his own world. He wondered what his Hermione would have said if she could see him now, surrounded by books and diligently researching.

He felt eyes upon him and looked up from his book to see the students that had summoned him standing in front of his table. He arched an eyebrow inquiringly.

"May we join you for a moment, Mr. Black," asked Neville, who was the apparent spokesperson for the quintet.

Harry took in their anxious but respectful faces and inclined his head. "Please, have a seat," he responded quietly. Even far away from Madame Pince, speaking quietly was best in her domain.

"Mr. Black, you pointed out to us in the Infirmary that we summoned you here without any of your resources. We had never even considered that aspect when we decided to make the attempt, and are embarrassed that we would so inconvenience anyone. We've spoken with our parents and would like to contribute from our allowances to help you gain a foothold in this world."

"That is appreciated, but unnecessary. I'm employed and am on the road to solvency."

The teens looked at one another and Harry remembered what Albus had told him. "Of course, if your assistance is part of your contrition for summoning me here, then good manners dictate that I agree and thank you for your consideration." The teens seemed to breathe a sigh of relief at not having to say their parents had directed them to do so as reparation.

Hermione looked at the stack of books around the older teen and asked, "What are you studying, sir?"

He hid the smile from Hermione calling him sir, but responded, "Since I don't know if I will ever be able to return home, I am learning all that I can of this world. That is also why I am auditing classes; so that I may retake my NEWTs here."

Hermione blushed brightly and hung her head a bit. "I am really sorry that we never realized we would be trapping you. I am so sorry that I never thought through all the ramifications of the spell."

"It wasn't just your failure," said Holly quickly. "We all failed to realize that there was a living human being at the other end of the spell that we were ripping out his homeworld."

"What's done is done," Harry said charitably. "As long as you learned to consider all aspects of a decision, then something was gained."

"What do you think you want to do for a career, Mr. Black," asked Sebastian.

Harry smiled at the young man who could have been his brother if circumstances had been different in his world. "I thought that I might take a Mastery in Defense, although I am also interested in both Warding and Curse-Breaking."

"My brother is a Curse Breaker for Gringotts," said Ron with a bit of interest. "I could introduce you to him if you want to speak with someone about the role."

Harry smiled briefly at the clone of his friend. "That's a very generous offer, Mr. Weasley. I may take you up on it at some point."

Sebastian leaned forward again, his eyes bright and interested. "What did you do for fun in your world, sir?"

"I've loved flying since my first time on a broom. Nothing makes me feel freer than flying through the sky. Of course, Quidditch is also a favorite pastime."

"You were brilliant when you worked with our team," said Ron with more enthusiasm. The Potter twins nodded their heads in agreement and smiled at him.

"Thank you. Just remember that I have to give all of the teams my equal attention and assistance," Harry reminded them.

"That's OK, sir," said Holly. "If the skill of all the players increases, it makes the game more interesting for both the players and the audience. Besides, I know a couple of students would like to pursue a professional career when they graduate, so they're doubly appreciative."

"So you enjoy flying and Quidditch, sir. Is that all?" Hermione seemed almost disappointed that here was another young man without more varied interests in his life.

"Well, I'm a decent cook and gardener," Harry admitted. While he wasn't pleased for his relatives forcing those roles on him, Preston

had helped him realize that he enjoyed the results; skills not everyone else had.

Neville immediately looked interested when he mentioned gardening. "I have a greenhouse that I oversee in the summers. I am considering attempting to grow the more rare plant varieties and add supplying apothecaries as a business venture when I graduate."

"I am certain you would do superbly, Mr. Longbottom," Harry said with a confident smile. "Unfortunately, most of my gardening was with Muggle plants and landscapes."

They chatted for several minutes about what each of the children was interested in pursuing as a career. Ron was interested in being an Auror or professional Quidditch player, while Hermione was interested in research, possibly as an Unspeakable. Holly thought about a Charms mastery, as she took after her mother or possibly Healing, while Sebastian was considering being an Auror or looking into Warding.

When reminded of James Potter, Harry felt himself building his emotional walls again. "While it has been pleasant speaking with you, I think perhaps that you should not be seen with me. Both your father and Professor Black seem to consider me a poor influence. I do not want to cause trouble with in your family. Besides, I should get back to my research."

Hermione and Neville took that as a dismissal and immediately stood up, followed more slowly by the other teens. Sebastian couldn't keep from asking, "Why would they consider you to be a bad influence? The Daily Oracle had an article about you protecting a shop keeper and made you out to be quite a hero." He flushed when he realized that was the type of person they wanted to summon.

"I can speak another language," Harry said with a tinge of bitterness. At their confusion, he shook his head. "You will need to speak with your father. As I understood it, speaking a non-human language makes one a dark wizard, regardless of one's behaviors and actions. I do not wish to cause trouble within your family, so advise that you keep your distance." He pulled over a book, indicating that the conversation was done.

The Floo flared and a voice called out, "Prongs, are you there?" James Potter entered the study and bent down before the green flames.

"I'm here, Padfoot. What's the matter?" he asked his old friend. He quickly pushed away thoughts of anything being wrong with the children, as the other man would have announced that immediately.

"Can I come through, Prongs?"

"I don't know if you can, but you may," he responded with a grin.

The other man grunted in annoyance, but stepped through the flames and into the Potter's study. "What's the matter," asked James, recognizing the troubled look on his friend's face.

"I don't know what's going on anymore, James. I really don't, especially after everything Peter said ." He began pacing the room.

"Peter will calm down," said James with assurance. "He'll come around."

"He was right," Sirius cried belligerently. "He was right. We forgot Moony. How could we forget Moony, Prongs? How could we forget one of our best friends?"

"There's a world of difference between Moony and Harrison Black," muttered James.

"Oh really? Moony didn't have a choice about being bitten, and a child has no control over what they inherit from their ancestors. It's what they do with their lives that make a difference."

"Exactly! Moony was studious and kind and gentle and smart with a hidden wicked sense of humor! While Harrison Black..."

A feminine voice spoke from the doorway, causing both men to whirl around in surprise. "While Harrison Black was tortured by a terrorist and kidnapped by children from another world. He didn't hold the kidnapping against our children, even though he's been taken from everything and everyone he's ever known. And based on what I read in the paper, he jumped to the defense of a shop keeper he's

never met before, only to be injured by someone in your own department for doing so." Lily Potter glared at her husband. She didn't know why James had suddenly taken a dislike to the young man, but everything she had seen indicated that he was a fine young man who had experienced too much pain and suffering in his young life.

She turned to her husband's best friend. "Hello Sirius, what brings you here tonight other than talking about Harrison Black?"

Sirius' eyes widened and darted between her and James. A slight shake of his friend's head let him know that James hadn't revealed the young man's Parseltongue abilities to his wife. "Um...just wanted to talk with James. You know how it is, Lily."

Her green eyes bore into his own and he fidgeted under the stare. She was as bad as Minerva McGonagall for getting the truth out of him without ever saying a word. "Black is a Parselmouth" he finally exclaimed and then covered his face and sat heavily into a chair.

"OK, so he's a Parselmouth, meaning he can speak with snakes. Why has that raised concerns and why were you comparing him to Remus?" Her voice softened on their friend's name, as it always did. She never forgot that he gave his life trying to protect her Harry.

"You know that's a sign of a dark wizard," James began only to have his voice falter and trail off when her stare was transferred to him.

"The sign of a dark wizard is in his behaviors and actions," corrected his wife. "Young Mr. Black has demonstrated nothing to indicate that he uses the dark arts or travels a dark path."

"He talked to a basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets at Hogwarts. Merlin only knows what he's capable of doing."

Lily looked between the repentant looking Sirius and the stubborn looking James. "Did he use the basilisk to threaten anyone?"

Sirius shook his head and James muttered, "Not yet."

"And what did Albus think?" James looked away from her, giving her the answer. "He trusts the young man, doesn't he?"

"He can be fooled, he's only human," blustered James.

"And the fact that his phoenix, a creature of the light sees nothing wrong with the young man?" Again her husband was silent. "James Charlus Potter, I am ashamed of you. What kind of example are you setting for our children?"

Sirius twisted uncomfortable and Lily's attention snapped back to him. "What is it, Sirius?"

The other man tried to look away from her, but her eyes kept him pinned to his seat. "Holly and Sebastian came to see me. They said Mr. Black suggested that they stay away from him outside of Quidditch training as he didn't want to cause trouble within the family. They wanted me to explain what he meant, and I couldn't. That's why I came here. I don't know what to say to the kids. Both kids already sent you a letter asking for an explanation James, but came to see me as well."

Lily's eyes narrowed and Sirius was suddenly reminded why they never played any pranks on her after Fourth year. Her retribution was decidedly scary and she wore the same face as she did back then. "Sirius, I think I need to speak with my husband alone." The other man sprang to his feet and threw the Floo powder into the fireplace without feeling any guilt at leaving his best friend to face his wife's wrath alone.

A knock on the door heralded Rufus Scrimgeour's response to Minister Malfoy's summons. He waved his wand at the door and indicated a chair before his desk. He immediately set up silencing spells as he didn't fully trust the wards in his office.

"Rufus, I would appreciate an update on the two vandals that attacked the half-blood shop keeper in Diagon Alley. Were you able to gain any more information on their organization?"

"Unfortunately Minister, like the others we've been able to catch, they are part of small groups of only three to five members, and only one of the group has a contact with the leader of another group. They use aliases among themselves and with the charmed hoods, their faces and voices are masked. Regrettably, the leader of their group was the one that escaped. The other two testified under Veritaserum that they don't know his real name."

"That is unsatisfactory, Rufus. We must find out more about the organization and who is behind it. While Lord Slytherin is assumed to be their leader, we need proof and I am growing impatient waiting for it."

"I understand, Mr. Malfoy. I have several aurors attempting to infiltrate the organization, but they've hidden their tracks very well."

"I don't want to hear excuses," Malfoy said, narrowing his grey eyes at the Auror. "I want results." He looked at a piece of paper on his desk before pushing it across to the Auror. "That is the medical bills for the young wizard who foiled the attack. His expenses will be coming out of your department's budget. Perhaps it will serve as a reminder that recruits need to be better-trained before being released onto the streets."

Rufus' eyes narrowed at the implied insult, but he maintained a bland face. "As you say, sir. If there's nothing else?"

The blonde returned to the paperwork on his desk, which the Auror took as dismissal, and he stalked out of the room, but closed the door quietly behind him. Malfoy looked up from his desk and smirked with clear amusement at the closed door.

The two men stood in front of a portrait guardian. "Are you sure these are his quarters?" asked the first.

"Yes," growled the second. "We all know where he lives."

A voice from around the corner drew their attention. "Well hello again Fawkes. I wasn't expecting a visit today." A melodic croon followed the comment. "Are you hoping that I'll ask the house elves for some grapes for you? Or perhaps a nice banana?" The lyrical response drew a chuckle of laughter from the quickly approaching voice.

When the young man turned the corner nearest his quarters, he was still chuckling at the phoenix on his shoulder, who was rubbing his face against the teen's cheek. The smile abruptly left the young man's face as he realized that James Potter and Sirius Black were waiting for him.

"Mr. Black, we're sorry to surprise you. We were hoping to have a word with you," said the messy-haired Auror with some discomfort.

"Is this an official inquiry, Auror Potter," asked Harry with icy civility.

James and Sirius exchanged glances. The phoenix on the young man's shoulder only emphasized the error they had made, and his curtness added to their embarrassment. "It's official only in as much as we want to apologize for our behavior the other day."

Harry stared at them for several long seconds, until both men were certain he was going to refuse them. Finally, he turned to the portrait and hissed the password, deliberately not lowering his voice so that they would hear it was in Parseltongue. "Come in then," he said curtly.

James and Sirius looked around the quarters. It presented a comfortable image, as Nebby had gone through a variety of furniture and knick-knacks kept in various Hogwarts store rooms until the quarters had a cozy lived-in look.

"Nebby," Harry called out once inside the room. With a small pop, the eager house elf appeared. "Young Master called for Nebby! What can Nebby be doing for the young Master?"

"Would you please bring Fawkes some grapes and a cut-up banana," he asked, "plus a cup of whatever fruit is currently available?"

"Oh yes sir," the elf nodded her ears flapping with the speed of her movements. "Nebby is doing that immediately. She popped away."

Harry transfigured a pen on his desk into a perch and Fawkes walked gracefully down his arm on to the perch. Nebby immediately returned with two full cups, which she attached to the perch and the phoenix trilled a happy melody that helped lift Harry's spirits.

Harry turned back to the two men and looked at them impassively. "Why do you want to apologize," he asked coolly.

That wasn't the question they had expected and their rehearsed speech suddenly faded away. They each fidgeted, and Sirius

nodded at James to answer the question, who glared back at his friend. "Err...because we were wrong," he finally said.

"And idiots," added Sirius.

Suddenly Harry remembered him asking Sirius and Remus why they had targeted Snape in school only to be told, "we were fifteen and idiots," as if that explained everything. A hint of a smile tugged at his lips, and the two older men relaxed fractionally upon seeing it.

"I grew up in a 'dark' family," began Sirius. "One that regularly practiced the dark arts and supported whatever Dark Lord was grabbing power at the time. My family struck my name from the Family tree when I refused to follow my pre-determined path. I left my home and am very grateful to James parents, who gave me refuge when I was a teenager." He looked at Harry, trying to let his sincerity show in his eyes. "I was and apparently still am very sensitive to any reminder of that time. They would have welcomed a Parselmouth with open arms, confident that only a dark wizard could have such ability. But I was wrong. Peter made sure I realized just how wrong." He stopped speaking and looked down, fidgeting a bit. He had never been good at apologizing and felt very awkward.

James spoke up, both to apologize himself and take the attention from his uncomfortable friend. "The Potter family has been supporters of the Light for centuries, and I might have taken that to extremes. I couldn't remember any 'light' wizard being a Parselmouth, so assumed only 'dark' wizards were."

Harry interrupted him and asked, "How did you decide that being able to speak a non-human language wasn't inherently evil?"

James ran his hand through his hair in a move that Harry recognized as one he did whenever uncomfortable. "The Peter Pettigrew you knew in your world is very different in ours. He's definitely not a traitor and is extremely loyal to his friends. He pretty much bludgeoned us for being bigots. A very good friend of ours was a werewolf, and he died trying to protect my first-born son. None of us ever thought of Remus as a dark creature; he was just Remus who happened to have been bitten as a young child. It definitely wasn't his fault. Peter had to point that out to us and remind us how Remus had been shunned and despised by most of the wizarding world for an assault that happened to him as a child."

He looked at Harry with pain evident on his face. "He would have been ashamed of us for judging you based on an ability that you have no control over."

Harry felt a wave of homesickness for Remus and closed his eyes briefly, biting the inside of his cheek to help regain control. He opened his eyes and looked at both repentant men. "I accept your apology," he said quietly. "I hope in the future you will judge me based on my actual behaviors rather than assumptions."

Both men grinned at the young man and gave him their assurances. After they left, Harry was amazed at the difference between the worlds.

"They seemed to be sincere," said Salazar quietly from his portrait.

"I thought so too. But more than anything, I'm amazed that Peter Pettigrew is the one that prompted them to re-think their prejudices. In my world, he was a weak man, the penultimate follower. And yet here he stood up to James and Sirius and told them off for considering me 'dark' and he hasn't even met me. That just boggles my mind."

"They wear the same faces, but they aren't the people you knew," responded Salazar.

"I know, that's what makes everything so odd. It's hard trying to reconcile everything I knew about these people with who they really are, and yet I would be a hypocrite to expect them to behave as their counterparts did in my world."

Fawkes looked up from the fruit he had been enjoying as he watched the two men apologize to the young man whose company he had come to enjoy. He trilled a soothing song, pleased when Harry relaxed into his chair, allowing the tension to release from his body.

Harry and Preston agreed to begin meeting every other day, so Harry joined the Hogwarts staff at breakfast. He sat with Rolanda Hooch on one side and Severus Snape on the other. He nodded politely to Sirius Black, who was seated next to the brown-haired Professor Burbage. That was another thing different between his

world and this one. Muggle Studies was taught by Professor Charity Burbage in his world, yet by the very male Charles Burbage in this one.

Near the end of breakfast, the loud flutter of wings announced the morning mail. To Harry's surprise, an owl landed before him, and extended a leg. Harry untied the expensive parchment envelope and offered the bird a strip of bacon, which was accepted gratefully. Once eaten, the owl took off again.

Harry was surprised to realize that many of the professors had received similar envelopes. Seeing that most of them were already perusing the missive, he broke the seal and opened his.

In glittering gold script, he read that he was invited to a ball hosted by Minister and Madame Malfoy, to be held at Malfoy Manor. He tried to hide his dismay at the invitation, and resorted to simply tucking it into an interior pocket of his robe.

Back in his room, he showed the invitation to Salazar. "I need a Slytherin explanation, Salazar. Why would the Minister of Magic invite me, a total unknown, to his exalted ball? I'm only a teaching assistant, and I noticed that not all of the staff received an invitation."

"You were summoned to his office after the unfortunate encounter in Diagon Alley, were you not? And the local newspaper portrayed you as the unsung hero who was viciously attacked by an Auror. This provides the opportunity for the Minister to show that he does not support the Auror's actions, and your attendance indicates that you hold no resentment to the Ministry for the assault."

"Bloody hell," Harry grumbled as he ran his hand through his messy hair. "And if I turn it down?"

"That would be ill-advised. This would be an excellent opportunity to discover more than what you can by reading books. How do the people interact with one another? Who listens to whom? Who defers to whom? And if you do stay in this world, any connections that you make may prove useful."

"So you think I should go?"

Salazar rolled his eyes, "Did I not make myself clear? It would be ill-advised not to attend. We will need to discuss your wardrobe and the appropriate greetings that you will need to use. Also, do you know how to dance?"

"Dance?" Harry squeaked. "Merlin, no one expects me to dance, do they?"

"Yes Harry, you will be subjected to that particular torture and will need to endure it with a charming smile and an air of grace and elegance."

"But...but...I don't know how to dance," the teen moaned, not even caring that he was whining like a child.

"Then it is time for you to learn," said the resolute Founder.

Harry found an unlikely dance instructor in Madame Rosmerta, the curvaceous landlady of the Three Broomsticks in Hogsmeade. For two sickles an hour, she taught him the traditional dances he would be expected to perform at the Mafloy ball. She teased him mercilessly, delighted when he blushed at her comments.

He walked back to Hogwarts after one such lesson with the sun long past the horizon, with only the moon and stars to lighten the path from Hogsmeade to the school. As he approached the gates, he heard a low moaning just off the side of the road. Harry drew his wand and cast a Lumos. The light showed a crumpled figure attempting to move and groaning in pain.

Looking around in case of an ambush, Harry approached cautiously. As the light from the wand illuminated the area, the figure rolled over, revealing the features of Peter Pettigrew. Harry grasped his wand more tightly, trying to stop the automatic hex that rose to his lips, even as his mind catalogued the differences. This man's face, while white with pain, did not bear the weak and fearful features of the Pettigrew he knew from his world. The man's hair was a light brown, while it was thin and graying on the man he remembered. He had a slender build, but seemed more lithe than skinny. The man's brown eyes looked at Harry and seemed to brighten with relief.

"James, thank Merlin! My group was finally assigned something significant, but one of the fools caught all of us with a blood boil

potion. I barely made it here. You have to tell Albus that the target is the Weasleys! Apparently the Blood Purists are going to make a bigger statement and are sending multiple groups to the Burrow. Tell Albus!" With that, the smaller figure lost consciousness.

Harry gasped when the man called him James, and groaned when he realized he hadn't recast the "Termino Agnitio" spell in over a week. He cast it quickly, and then because the man seemed desperate to help protect the Weasleys, Harry cast a Mobilicorpus on him and then disillusioned him, and ran towards Hogwarts. As he hurried through the halls, he paused at a painting only long enough to tell the knight within to ask Dumbledore to come to the Infirmary immediately, then continued running. Once in the Infirmary, he was relieved to see it empty. "Poppy!" he shouted as he laid the injured man on a bed and removed the disillusionment.

"What is it at this time of night," the Matron asked as she bustled from her private quarters into the room.

"I found him outside of Hogwarts. He was the victim of a blood boiling potion. Apparently there is going to be an attack on the Weasleys. Please let the Headmaster know that I'm already heading there."

He ignored whatever the woman tried to tell him and dashed back out of the Infirmary and towards the front doors. As quickly as he could, he sprinted past the wards and apparated to the Burrow.

The battle was already in progress when he arrived. He counted at least six dark-robed hooded figures breaking through the wards and trying to set fire to the house and assumed more were on the other side of the house. Harry's only thoughts were to protect his adopted family, the only people that consistently cared about him after he learned that he was a wizard.

He took shelter behind a tree and began stunning every dark-robed figure he could see. Once the figure fell, he cast a bone-crushing curse at their legs and wand hand to prevent them from getting back into battle. He was tempted to use some of the darker spells that he learned from Riddle, but chose to only incapacitate the attackers. Once the fighters realized someone was behind them, they turned and began retaliating.

Harry saw some red-headed figures come out of the home and begin counter-attacking when they realized the attackers were split between two enemies. Realizing that the Weasleys were now in the thick of the battle, the teen moved like a man possessed, darting forward to incapacitate a figure only to dodge the multiple curses streaking his way to find another cover to start the process over again.

Finally, the Order and Aurors began to arrive and Harry caught his breath. He saw Bill bleeding from a gouging curse and quickly cast a healing spell. "Is everyone all right? Who's injured," he asked urgently, the adrenalin still flowing.

"I think everyone is all right now, Mr. Black," said Albus calmly.

A number of the attackers were able to port-key away, but those still stunned were collected by the Aurors. "Who cast all the bone-crushing spells," asked Kingsley Shacklebolt.

"That would be me," admitted Harry. "I learned a long time ago that only stunning an opponent meant one of their comrades would enervate them and they would attack from behind. Breaking their wand hand usually prevented that, or their legs kept them from running away, but left them well enough for interrogations after a bit of healing."

"I see," said Shacklebolt thoughtfully, scrutinizing the young man with a carefully. "How did you come to be here?"

"I ran into someone who was trying to reach the Headmaster to warn him of the upcoming attack. I left him in the Hogwarts Infirmary and came here to lend a hand."

"He did a bit more than that," said Arthur Weasley with a bemused half-smile and a shake of his head. "Once he arrived, it was almost all over. He fought like a demon, and it seemed like they had no chance once he targeted them."

"He risked his life repeatedly to save us," Bill Weasley said in defense of the young man. "What I don't understand is why."

Harry shifted uncomfortably. "I've never been one to stand by and do nothing when I can help," he said quietly. His adrenalin high was

beginning to drop and he was now feeling tired. The Aurors finished taking statements and departed, along with the Order members. Harry began to make his goodbyes when he was stopped by Molly.

"Mr. Black, why did you risk your life as you did?" Her brown eyes were fixed on his as she asked quietly, but in a no-nonsense tone. He tried to wave her question aside, but she said firmly, "I need you to be honest about this, even if about nothing else. We owe you a life debt, perhaps more than one, and we would like to know why."

"I absolve you of any life debts," Harry replied. "You don't owe me anything."

Albus stepped forward. "Mr. Black, I do not wish to intrude on your privacy, but perhaps you could share a memory with us from your life before that would help the Weasleys understand."

Harry looked around the faces of the Weasleys who were there. All of them were pleading with their eyes and he reluctantly nodded. They gathered around the kitchen table, and Albus Floo'd to his office as Molly moved around the kitchen efficiently making tea for everyone. Within minutes, Albus returned with his pensieve.

Harry put his wand to his temple and thought about his first Christmas with the Weasleys, and withdrew the memory and placed it into the pensieve.

It was Christmas at the Burrow as evidenced by the house being decorated with holly and mistletoe. The family was gathered around the kitchen table; it was chaotic with multiple conversations happening at once. Among the many red heads were two with other hair colors. One was a beautiful blonde sitting next to Bill, one hand tucked through his arm, and his hand covering hers. The other was a slight raven-haired teen in glasses who sat next to Ron. It was obviously a family dinner and the table seemed to be groaning under the dishes.

Harry prepared to leave when they withdrew from the memory, but Molly stepped forward and stopped him by holding his arm, and then clasped both of his shoulders. In a very soft voice she said, "I'm looking forward to getting to know you better, Harry. You will have to come to Sunday dinner."

"There's no need, Mrs. Weasley," Harry said as he shuffled his feet and tried not to look as uncomfortable as he felt. "I just wanted you to understand."

She smiled gently and moved one hand up to brush his hair out of his eyes. "You were at the Burrow at Christmas," she answered.

"Yes ma'am," the young man admitted. "I spent a number of holidays and summers at the Burrow. In my world, Ron was my best mate."

The twins looked up in surprise. "You're more our age than the Ronniekins. How did that happen?"

Harry shrugged, "I'm not sure. Time doesn't seem to have moved quite the same way. We were the same age in my world." He frowned at the twins and added, "How are you even here? Why aren't you at school?"

They looked at one another and avoided their parent's eyes. "We were near the Infirmary when you went running in. We heard you say there was going to be an attack on the Burrow, so while Madame Pomfrey was distracted, we used her Floo to come home."

Their mother shook her head at the boys. "We'll talk about that later, and I'm sure Professor McGonagall will also be speaking with you." She turned back to Harry and added, "Thank you for explaining, Harry. You were in the same year as Ron?" At Harry's nod she continued, "Harry dear, you were obviously one of our family in your world. I'm certain that my other self would want our family to stand beside you here as well."

Harry felt an empty spot in his chest warm up with his adopted mother's offer. "Mrs. Weasley, I understand that you don't know me and I didn't show you that memory to try to manipulate you into making a place for me. You don't have to worry about it."

The twins shook their heads in amusement and began speaking quickly, ending each other's thoughts.

"Harry," said Fred, "Mum and the rest of us recognized..."

"...that you were wearing a Weasley jumper," continued George.

"Mum only makes them for us kids..."

"...which makes you an honorary Weasley..."

"...so you're busted bro!"

Molly chuckled at the twins and then slid one arm into Harry's arm and pulled him towards a chair. "Now tell me who that beautiful girl was next to Bill," she demanded.

Harry laughed, the first free and natural laugh anyone had heard from him since he had arrived. "Her name is Fleur Delacour. She is French and is part Veela. In my world, Bill and Fleur were engaged to be married."

"Veela!" gasped Bill.

"And French dear brother," laughed George.

Mrs. Weasley had a delighted expression as she said "Engaged! Harry dear, tell me everything. How did they meet and when? She was beautiful and obviously deeply in love with Bill."

Bill rolled his eyes at Harry, but clearly was just as curious as his mother about the enchantingly beautiful blonde.

"Well, it happened like this," he began as the Weasley family gathered round.

Chapter 10 – Dancing with the Malfoys

The twins woke Ron early and asked one of the girls in the Common Room to fetch Ginny, saying only that it was a "Family matter". Once all four siblings were downstairs and in a corner of the Common Room, the twins began to set privacy spells around them. Ron and Ginny looked at each other uneasily. The twins looked serious and that simply wasn't normal.

Finally, the spells were set and they sat down across from the younger redheads. "Last night, the Burrow was attacked," began George.

"No one was hurt and the Burrow itself is OK," quickly added Fred as the faces listening paled.

"They were all in dark cloaks with their hoods up and spelled for concealment," continued George.

Ron's eyes narrowed and while Ginny's widened. "Blood purists?" they both asked.

Fred and George both nodded. "We were near the Infirmary when Harrison Black came running by levitating an injured man," stated Fred.

"We were curious, so stood in the shadows of the doorway."

"We heard Black say that there was going to be an attack on the Burrow..."

"...So while Madame Pomfrey was distracted, we used the Floo in her office to race home."

"Why didn't you get us," demanded Ron, his pallor now beginning to turn red in indignation.

"We didn't know if the attack was already underway," replied Fred.

"And what if the ten minutes it would take to find you meant the difference in Mum or Dad dying?" added George.

Ginny's brow furrowed as she tried to piece it all together, "How did Mr. Black know about the attack?"

"We think the injured man was either a Blood Purist who was caught..."

"...or else Dumbledore's informant, but that's not important..."

"...what's important is that Black showed up and tore through the attackers..."

"...risking his life for Mum and Dad."

Ginny appeared surprised, but relieved that another was there to help, but Ron had a large and satisfied grin on his face. "So he IS a hero," he exclaimed as if vindicated.

George and Fred rolled their eyes. When they heard what the five teens had done, they could easily believe Ron had been involved. He stood by Neville steadfastly and tried to protect and support him at every turn. Hermione Granger was probably more interested in the research and mechanics of the ritual and had thought of it as an experiment until a living breathing person showed up. They had been surprised that the Potter twins had been involved, considering their parents, but apparently they too put their loyalty to Neville above the ramifications. After all that happened, they were just surprised that the whole school didn't know Black was from another world, although the rumor that he was the bastard son of Sirius Black was probably a juicier rumor.

"We learned one more thing about Black. Mum couldn't understand why Black risked his life recklessly for the Weasleys," added George.

"The Headmaster suggested Black share one of his memories, anything that would help Mum understand," continued Fred.

Ginny shook her head and looked confused. "Share a memory? How do you share a memory?"

"There's something called a pensieve. They're very expensive and usually used by the DMLE to help prove guilt or innocence," explained George.

"Dumbledore had one. The memory Black shared was at Christmas at the Burrow."

"Everyone was around the table talking at once."

"A sea of redheads, plus one dark-haired boy..."

"...and a gorgeous blonde girl..." Both twins grinned.

"The boy was wearing a green sweater..."

"...one of Mum's sweaters..." Both twins looked expectantly at their younger siblings.

"But Mum only makes them for us," Ron said confused.

The puzzlement on Ginny's face began to clear. "Was he adopted by Mum and Dad in his world?"

The twins gave her a brilliant smile. "Unofficially, but yeah, he was considered Family in his world."

The two older brothers looked at each other and grinned. "Guess who his best mate was?"

"Well you two obviously," began Ron, but Ginny shook her head, "Best mate, not mates?" She received another smile and nod from the twins.

"He said time seemed to react oddly when he arrived here. In his world, he was the same age as Ronniekins."

The younger redhead looked stunned. "I was his best mate?" A look of shame crossed his face and he dropped his head down to the table they sat around and banged it twice. "I called him a coward in the Infirmary, said he was probably a Blood Purist himself when he didn't immediately offer to help Neville." He hit his head on the table twice more. "He was barely alive and in pain, pulled from his own world and friends, and when he wouldn't jump at the chance of being a hero, I called him a coward! No wonder he forced that memory of being tortured at me. I deserved it."

Ginny rubbed his shoulders but replied, "Yeah, you did. But you apologized, didn't you?"

Ron shook his head, "Not good enough, especially if I was his best friend in his world."

The twins looked at each other and held a private conversation with their eyes. They each gave an imperceptible nod. "Well, if you want to wallow in your self-pity," began Fred.

"...we won't tell you about the gorgeous French part-veela blonde that Bill was going to marry in Harry's world."

Ginny's head snapped up. "Oh Merlin, did Mum learn about her?" The twins nodded gleefully. "You just know she's going to track her down and invite her to the Burrow to meet Bill, you just wait and see."

Harry sat down heavily in his quarters, tired after the grueling training session with the Gryffindor team. Ron had flushed and looked extremely embarrassed and wouldn't make eye contact. It was how his Ron had acted when he had messed up and needed to apologize, but before he could gather his courage to do so. He felt a pang of grief, missing his Ron Weasley more than he thought possible.

Ginny seemed to want to put him on a pedestal for saving her parents and home. She had thanked him with quiet sincerity, her eyes shining in gratitude.

The twins had been their usual boisterous and good-natured selves, but had been sure to include him in their smiles, almost like the twins back in his world did.

Hedwig flew into the room and landed on the back of his chair. She jumped to his shoulder and then to his lap. "Hello Hedwig," he greeted her as he stroked her head gently. "Have I told you what a beautiful owl you are lately? Your beauty surpasses all other owls." Hedwig seemed extremely pleased with the praise and affectionately nibbled on a finger before ducking her head under his hand, obviously demanding more petting. Harry chuckled and stroked her head down to her neck, and then rubbed under the feathers, scratching her neck just where she liked it.

"You seem to have a true familiar bond with your owl," commented Salazar as he looked at the two enjoying each other's company.

Harry smiled up at the portrait. "She was my best friend in my world. Sometimes she was the only one I could talk to for months. She is the most intelligent owl ever hatched," he added. Hedwig seemed to nod her agreement and then waited expectantly. "And the best natured and the most beautiful," the teen added, and chuckled when Hedwig rumbled in contentment.

He smiled again at the portrait as he stroked Hedwig. "She always knows where I am and can find anyone to deliver a note. She understands everything I say as well, don't you girl?" Hedwig rumbled and nodded.

"When you are done bonding with Miss Hedwig, we need to review the proper greetings for all ages and statuses, bowing, and how to enter a room appropriately." Harry groaned and turned pleading eyes at Salazar.

"None of that," the portrait responded without sympathy. "At the ball you will be meeting those in power, those climbing to power and those slipping from power. You need to make a good impression in order to form appropriate alliances in the future. The depth of your bow to a Family Dowager and to an Heir should not be the same, and I will not permit a protégé of mine to embarrass himself or me.

Under Salazar's critical eye and Hedwig's amused rumbles, Harry spent the next two hours practicing how to enter a populated room, how to greet people of all classes, performed the five most common bows, and memorized Salazar's counsel on casual conversation.

"You must always remember names," Salazar advised. "Look them in the eye when you speak their name and pronounce it as if it is a pleasurable experience. A person's name is frequently the sweetest sound they know. Ask questions about their interests and encourage them to speak about themselves. Try to remember what is important to them so that you are able to inquire about it in a subsequent encounter."

"Did you offer classes on the social graces when Hogwarts was founded, Salazar?"

Salazar nodded his approval of the question and use of his name before responding, "We offered a class on 'Wizarding Customs and Traditions'. Etiquette was of course an element of that instruction."

"Do you miss teaching?" asked Harry.

"A good effort, but do not ask a question that could potentially remind the listener of loss," counseled Salazar. "Try again."

"What piques your interest these days?" tried Harry.

Salazar nodded his approval. "Well done. That gives the speaker an opportunity to extol his interests and gives you an advantage for your next discussion or interaction." Harry shook his head, wondering if he would ever think like a Slytherin. "Relax and do not try so hard," chuckled Salazar, easily reading his pupil's expressions. "Call for tea, Harry. You need to learn how to hold an intelligent conversation while holding a beverage with grace and elegance in your hand."

Harry groaned and muttered "sadist" but complied.

Peter recovered within hours from the blood boiling potion with Madame Pomfrey's help as well as a counter-agent from the resident Potions Master. After the cure, he slept for 24-hours as his system recovered. Now released from Poppy's tender care, he walked to the Headmaster's office, keeping a notice-me-not spell on him to avoid the students becoming aware of him and raising anyone's curiosity.

"Peter, come in my dear boy and have a seat! It appears that Poppy did her usual fine job in healing your injuries."

"Yes, thank you Albus. I'm much better. Poppy said there were no serious injuries at the Burrow?"

Albus smiled at him over his glasses and summoned an elf to request tea and scones. "Your warning was perfectly timed, dear boy. The Weasleys and their home are all in fine shape."

Peter sipped his tea and considered how to phrase his next question without sounding like he had gone bonkers. Finally he looked at the

elderly wizard and asked, "To whom did I give my report? Did I break my cover?"

The blue eyes twinkled at him, and Peter tried not to growl at the sight. He hated it when the Headmaster played games. "To whom did you think you spoke," responded Albus.

Peter glared at the old man over his tea cup, silently refusing to play the game. After several long moments, Albus sighed. "Fine, don't give an old man his entertainment." Peter's lips twitched, but he remained silent. "Young Mr. Harrison Black heard you moaning near the gates of Hogwarts, brought you to the Infirmary and then headed to the Burrow to help after leaving me a message."

Peter frowned, trying to place the name. "Young Mr....oh, is that the young man that Sirius and James insulted?"

"Yes, although I understand both James and Sirius apologized for their unwarranted assumptions about the young man. I also heard from an unnamed source that not only did you chastise them, but Lily was rather...displeased as well."

Peter's lips twitched again and then a broad grin broke across his face, although he tried to hide it behind his teacup. "They roused her ire, did they? I'm glad it was them and not me."

"Indeed." Both men gave a mental shudder at the heights that Lily's temper could reach once inflamed.

Harry straightened his back, raised his chin and made an effort to meet his doom with all the Gryffindor courage he possessed. The gargoyle jumped aside and he allowed the stairs to carry him to the Headmaster's office where he would meet the others from Hogwarts that were attending the Minister's ball.

Salazar had insisted he ask Madame Pince for books on wizarding genealogy, so that he would be prepared to understand who the notable witches and wizards were that he might meet. Once Harry completed the books, Salazar had him explain why each of the staff had been invited.

Obviously Dumbledore held important positions both in the Wizengamot and as the Headmaster of Hogwarts. Sirius was the

Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Black, as well as wealthy and held a seat on the Wizengamot. The McGonagalls were a pureblood Scottish family, and to Harry's surprise, the sister to the Head of the McGonagall clan. Through his pureblooded mother, Severus was the Heir to the Ancient House of Prince, a respected and wealthy House. And of course Harry himself was the 'young hero' who protected the innocents only to be attacked by an incompetent Auror, or at least that was the way the Daily Prophet had presented the story.

Albus smiled at the teen as he entered the office, his look of dread not quite disguised. "Welcome my boy. You are looking elegant this evening." Following Salazar's advice, Harry was dressed in expensive yet muted traditional formal robes of a green just slightly darker than his eyes. Albus on the other hand, was dressed in a royal purple robe with golden embroidery, but toned down from his normal fluorescent daywear.

"Thank you, Headmaster," Harry replied with a slight formal bow appropriate to a respected elder. He turned to Minerva and added, "You are looking regal this evening, Professor." The Transfiguration teacher wore a black silk gown with a green and black tartan sash over her left shoulder secured with a brooch.

The stern woman's face relaxed slightly as she inclined her head. "Thank you, Mr. Black."

Sirius Black wore an expensive set of deep blue robes, while Severus was in – to no one's surprise – black, simply more formal than his normal attire.

"Are we all ready then? We're scheduled to arrive momentarily." He threw some Floo powder into the flames of the fireplace and called out, "Malfoy Manor" as he stepped in. Each of the others followed suit.

Harry managed to step from the Floo without stumbling, but only because Neville's Grandmother had noticed his difficulty and had made him spend half a day Floo'ing between two fireplaces at the Longbottom Manor until he could arrive with "competence". As the youngest and least important, he was the last of the foursome to arrive, and looked quickly around the room to gather his bearings. They were in a large formal drawing room with double doors that

opened onto the main entrance hall. The room was sumptuous and decorated with ornate antique furniture that screamed understated elegance and wealth. It wasn't a room he had seen when he had been held prisoner there in his own world...he quickly forced those thoughts away and reminded himself that these were not the same people.

Lucius Malfoy greeted them with a well-bred smile; his wife and son on his right. "Headmaster, what a pleasure that you could leave the school and the children to visit us this evening," Harry heard the Minister say with silky cultured tones.

"I wouldn't dream of missing it, Lucius," the older wizard said genially. "Narcissa, you are looking lovely this evening, as usual of course." And she was beautiful. She wore a magnificent sapphire blue gown that matched her eyes, softened her face and lent color to her features. A diamond necklace with a large sapphire pendant brought attention to her elegant neck. Harry waited as the Malfoys greeted the others before him, moving from Lucius to Narcissa to Draco and who then showed them out to the entrance hall. He was surprised that Narcissa presented her cheek to Sirius, who dropped a kiss onto it.

"Mr. Black," said Lucius with a small smile as Harry's turn came. "Welcome to Malfoy Manor. I am pleased that you accepted our invitation."

After hours of practicing with Salazar, Harry was able to perform a credible bow and then accepted the other man's hand for a quick shake. "You honored me with the invitation, Minister Malfoy," he replied, managing not to choke on the title.

"Narcissa my dear, please allow me to present Mr. Harrison Black, the hero of Diagon Alley." Harry barely controlled the twitch of his lips at the title. Merlin, Salazar was right again.

"Mr. Black," Narcissa Malfoy sounded genuinely pleased to meet Harry. He bowed over her hand and brushed his lips over her knuckles. He felt a little silly, but apparently his efforts were suitable and he had followed the proper etiquette as she smiled at him as he straightened. "I am enchanted that you could join us this evening."

"Thank you for permitting me into your beautiful home," he responded.

"It is our pleasure to have you here," she said with another warm smile. However, he wasn't about to confuse the social graces with genuine warmth or kindness. "Draco, you know Mr. Black, I believe?"

The blonde teen looked every inch the young prince tonight, without appearing overbearingly arrogant. "Yes, Mother. Welcome, Mr. Black. We are delighted to have the pleasure of your company."

Harry shook hands with the young man and inclined his head politely as he was senior to the boy at school. "Thank you, Mr. Malfoy. I look forward to the evening." His duty done, he joined the other Hogwarts staff out in the entrance hall; a large area with portraits lining the walls who looked at each guest with curiosity, and a magnificent carpet that covered most of the marble floor. A striking arrangement of flowers filled the large circular table in the center of the room. Voices came through the open doors beyond the hall that drew them into hallway leading to the elegant arched entrance into the ballroom.

The ballroom was enormous with soaring white marble columns, gilded wall panels alternated with rich jewel-tone tapestries. The lofty fresco ceiling was lit by crystal chandeliers. As Harry looked around, a profusion of colors were represented by the scores of witches and wizards in attendance, and he was secretly pleased to realize that his attire equaled those already in attendance.

Until he could calm his nervousness, Harry stayed near the Hogwarts staff. Many people came up to Dumbledore to pay their respects, giving Harry an opportunity to be introduced.

"Good evening, Mr. Black," said a slightly breathless voice. Harry turned to see the younger of the Greengrass sisters smiling hesitantly at him. What was her name again? Ah yes, Astoria. "Good evening, Miss Greengrass. Are you enjoying the ball?"

"Yes sir, although it will be more enjoyable once the music starts." She looked at him with wide eyes and he bit back a sigh. "I hope you will reserve a dance for me," he responded politely.

Her cheeks flushed even as her smile widened. "That would be very pleasant sir. Might I trouble you for a few moments? I would like to introduce you to my parents."

That gave him the incentive to leave the security of the Hogwarts staff. He bowed to Mr. Greengrass and brushed a kiss over Mrs. Greengrass' hand, and then pleasantly to Daphne, the older sister who also attended Hogwarts. From there, other students gravitated towards him to introduce him to their parents. It was obvious that the girls wanted to flirt with him while the boys took the opportunity to ask about his exploits in Diagon Alley; questions they didn't feel right asking in school.

When the music began, Harry asked the closest woman to dance and was somewhat surprised to find himself escorting Amelia Bones to the dance floor.

"I think my niece was hoping you would invite her," the older woman stated with a hint of a smile.

"She appears to be a delightful young woman," he said without hesitation. "It clearly must be a family trait."

Her lips twitched into a reluctant smile. "I now understand how you have enchanted so much of the student body, Mr. Black."

"I think it is simply a new face that has drawn the attention. Anything new or different captures attention easily."

"And your adventures in Diagon Alley only added to the appeal," she responded with an arched brow.

"I'm never going to live that down, am I?" He thought he had managed to keep the whine out of his voice, but her warm chuckle let him know he wasn't totally successful. "All I did was try to stop some bullies until the Aurors arrived."

The older woman's grey eyes evaluated him closely. "Have you considered a career as an Auror, Mr. Black?"

"Yes ma'am. I am considering law enforcement, a defense mastery, warding and curse-breaking. One would think at my age I could

settle on a single interest, but I find myself intrigued by many topics and interests."

Harry made certain to invite Narcissa Malfoy to a dance and was actually surprised when she accepted. He mentally thanked Madame Rosmerta for the lessons as he deftly avoided Narcissa's toes on the dance floor. He asked her about the Manor and let her talk about the various stages of expansion it had undergone over the centuries. Even though she carried the bulk of the conversation, he was relieved when the dance was done.

Over the course of the evening, he also danced with several students, including both Greengrass sisters, Susan Bones as well as Lavender Brown. As he returned her to her parents, he realized they were right next to the Potters.

Lily was beautiful in a dark ruby red taffeta gown with a metallic embroidered neckline and beaded skirt. He bowed to her first, then to James and inclined his head towards the twins. James and Sebastian were both in traditional black formal robes while Holly wore a dark aqua georgette overskirt with a pale aqua satin under dress. As another dance started, Harry turned to Lily and asked, "May I have the honor of this dance?" He wasn't certain whether to be pleased or nervous when she accepted.

"How are you adjusting, Mr. Black," she asked with warm interest in her voice.

"It's challenging seeing faces I know on people I don't know," he admitted. "But I'm adapting. Headmaster Dumbledore has been gracious in permitting me to stay at Hogwarts until I retake my NEWTs."

Lily had been wondering and finally couldn't help but ask, "Did you know my family in your world?"

Harry nearly stumbled but recovered quickly. "I didn't have the honor of your acquaintance," he replied cautiously.

"Not even the twins at school?" Lily persisted.

"Not that I recall, and twins are not that common. Of course, perhaps the Weasley twins were rambunctious enough to keep the attention on themselves."

Lily laughed quietly. "You have a point. They do seem to always be at the center of whatever is happening."

Harry found it surreal to dance with Lily, the image of his mother if she had lived beyond twenty. He realized that his mother had barely been older than he was now when she was killed. Lily saw the shadow of grief pass over the teen's face and wondered what memory had caused it. He shook himself mentally and smiled at her again and asked one of the questions he felt was safe, "What can you tell me about those in attendance?"

She smiled at the non sequitur, but began to point out various witches and wizards, telling amusing anecdotes about them.

When the music stopped, he escorted her back to James, and was slightly relieved that Holly wasn't there to ask to dance. He needed to get away for a few minutes to collect himself.

He slipped out one of the sets of French doors to the balcony and leaned against the balustrade. From the balcony, he could see the entrance to the grounds of the mansion was designed grandly. A high manicured yew hedge bordered the driveway on both sides. The drive was perfectly straight, running through the wrought-iron gates and straight up to the front door.

The moon was bright enough that he could also see the Manor was surrounded by elaborate gardens and could hear water tinkling from at least one fountain. A wandering albino peacock caught his eye and he shook his head. The Manor and grounds were majestic; no wonder Draco Malfoy had acted like such a pampered little prince in his world if he had grown up surrounded by such wealth and elegance.

He was startled when a smooth baritone voice said, "The grounds are lovely, are they not? The Malfoys have always had exquisite taste. This Manor was built in the sixteenth century if I'm not mistaken."

Harry turned to see a tall, handsome and impeccably dressed man in muted colors, but after Salazar's training he also recognized that his robes were made of the finest materials. Jet black hair rose above dark brown eyes that were fringed with dark lashes that were sure to be the envy of many ladies. He held a flute of champagne in one elegant hand. Harry's attention was drawn to his chest, where a locket lay of heavy gold with a serpentine "S" in emeralds inlaid on the front.

"My apologies for intruding on your thoughts," the man said smoothly with a slight inclination of his head. "I am Lord Slytherin."

Harry could see the resemblance to the young Tom Riddle he had met in the Chamber of Secrets, but the man bore no resemblance to Voldemort. After a surprised moment, Harry recollected himself and offered the appropriate bow. "Lord Slytherin, it is an honor to make your acquaintance. I am Harrison Black."

A smile tugged at the older man's lips. "Ah yes, what did the Daily Oracle call you?" He noticed the barely controlled embarrassment as he continued, "the hero of Diagon Alley".

"I'm never going to live that down," Harry repeated his earlier words ruefully.

"But it earned you a meeting with the Minister of Magic and an invitation to one of the premier social events of the season," replied Slytherin.

"If that had been my purpose, then I would be congratulating myself on my cunning. Unfortunately, I was just incensed when those vandals started destroying beautiful works of glass, and moved to stop them."

The older man gave a chuckle of amusement and waved a hand. A house elf immediately appeared with a tray of filled glasses. He set the empty flute down and picked up another. The elf turned to Harry, offering the tray. "Dobby!" he exclaimed before he could stop himself.

The house elf looked at him in surprise. It was definitely Dobby, but with amazing differences. There were no wounds or bruises visible on his body, and he wore a crisp white pillowcase with the Malfoy crest on it. "Yes sir? You is knowing Dobby, sir?"

Harry thought quickly as he picked up a champagne flute. "I thought you were Dubby," he stressed the similar difference in pronunciation, "which surprised me. My apologies for the mistake."

"You is apologizing to Dobby?" The wide eyes opened further and then he shook his head violently. "You is a wizard and should not be apologizing to Dobby. May I get sirs anything else?"

"No thank you," Harry said politely while Slytherin waved a casual hand. The house elf popped out, with barely a sound heard over the music.

"You are uncommonly polite to house elves," remarked Slytherin, looking at him over the top of his newly acquired flute.

"I've learned over time that treating others with courtesy has rarely been unwarranted or unrewarded," Harry parried.

Slytherin smiled again, a pleasant sight on his handsome features. "You are a very unusual young man. You must join me for tea some day."

Harry bowed politely and responded, "You are too kind, Lord Slytherin." With another enigmatic smile and a slight nod, the older man returned to the house.

Harry sat the champagne flute down on the balustrade and grasped it with tight hands to keep them from visibly trembling as he took a very deep breath and released it slowly. He moved into the shadows as the memories threatened to overwhelm him.

"Tom, we all die," he said softly. "But all of your life, you've been too afraid to face it, haven't you?" He looked at the enraged older man with wonder and then understanding slowly crossed his face. "But it's not really death that you're afraid of, is it?"

Voldemort's red eyes narrowed in fury as he hissed, "I am Lord Voldemort and I am afraid of nothing!"

Harry responded gently, "You're afraid of being nothing, of not mattering. You're afraid that you will be forgotten and that all your grand plans will crumble to dust. So you've done all this," he swept

his damaged arm tiredly around the room, encompassing not just the dungeon, but indicating all of Voldemort's actions. "I'm sorry for you, Tom."

After he had ripped out the man's heart, Voldemort had grabbed his wrist and Harry had to watch as anger and disbelief changed into dread. The man truly was terrified of dying and ceasing to exist, to matter. It was his fear that drove much of his life, and so many lives were lost because of his horror. Harry watched as the life faded from the other man's eyes, but the terror never dulled. He couldn't regret killing him to save hundreds if not thousands of others, but he didn't think he would ever forget the look of absolute hopelessness on the man's face.

A soft voice broke him from the memories, "Are you all right, Mr. Black?" Harry raised pain-filled eyes to see Severus Snape looking at him with mild concern.

Harry drew a shaky breath and released it slowly. "I will be, thank you Professor." The older man raised an eyebrow, but didn't challenge him. Instead, he stayed with him in companionable silence until the Harry's trembling ceased and they could venture inside once again.

Peter pondered the enigma that was Harrison Black. Why did he remember speaking to James if Albus was sure it was the young Black visitor? He didn't look that much like Sirius, so he probably wasn't a mistake from the Maruader's younger and more profligate days. He chuckled as he remembered what a rake Sirius the Marauder had been. His eyes widened suddenly and he quickly strode to a closet used for storage. He dug through several boxes until he found an old parchment, and a pleased smile crossed his lips.

In the Headmaster's office, Harry watched as the conversation was once again derailed as Sirius and Severus bickered with one another. He had been invited to discuss the possibility of a dueling competition among the students. Severus was willing to participate in a demonstration with Sirius, but wanted additional staff members to watch the participants. Sirius questioned Severus' ability to control the students with his glare, which started the good-natured trading of insults.

Harry couldn't quite suppress a grin. While acid-tongued, this Snape wasn't nasty and bitter. While still a prankster, Sirius was obviously more tolerant and accepting of Slytherins. The teen shook his head at the surreal picture before him of Sirius and Severus actually getting along.

Dumbledore's voice was soft, "From your expression, I assume my professors were not quite the same in your world, Mr. Black?"

"No," the young man sighed, "They were quite different."

The door opened suddenly and Peter Pettigrew entered, holding an old parchment. He looked around the room in confusion and then stared at Harry before exclaiming, "Oh sweet Merlin...Harry!"

Harry felt his face pale as he recognized the parchment in the older man's hands. Even so, he tried for nonchalance. "I am Harrison Black. Although we haven't been formally introduced, I am relieved to see you looking better than you did a few nights ago, Mr. Pettigrew."

The older man didn't seem to hear a word he said, but was staring at Harry with wonder. "Harry," he tried again, but his voice broke with emotion.

Sirius approached the other man and laid a hand on his shoulder. "Peter, what's the matter? Are you all right?"

"No," Peter said shaking his head. "How could I be with Harry Potter standing before me?"

Harry closed his eyes and sighed in frustration as Sirius asked in confusion, "What do you mean Harry Potter? This is Harry Black."

Severus looked at the younger man and an eyebrow arched. "That explains a great deal," he murmured.

"No wonder I thought you were James," exclaimed Peter shakily. "But...you don't look quite the same now."

Sirius looked down at Peter's copy of the Marauder's Map and realized that the only names in the Headmaster's office were Albus

Dumbledore, Severus Snape, Sirius Black, Peter Pettigrew and Harry Potter. He turned and stared at the younger man. "Harry? Why didn't you say anything?"

Harry held up his hand, palm out. "Hold it. I'm not going to discuss this at all without an unbreakable vow from all of you that nothing said is shared without my permission or until I am dead."

Albus frowned slightly, "I don't think that will be necessary..."

"No Albus, I will say nothing without that vow," he looked each of the men in the eyes, "from each of you."

Peter drew his wand first and said, "I, Peter Pettigrew vow that anything Harry Potter says in this office today will be held confidential until he authorizes disclosure or dies." Severus followed with his own oath and then a very reluctant Albus gave his vow. Sirius looked at Harry and started to ask a question, but Harry interrupted him with, "I won't say anything at all without your oath." Sirius gave it grudgingly.

Harry took a deep breath and paced before Albus' shelves a few times before he turned to look at the others. "You all know that I was summoned," he used air quotes around that word, "from my own world. I was pretty certain it was either a Death Eater plot or I was hallucinating when I saw the faces of people I knew were dead. If you were Death Eaters in disguise, you would have reacted to a different name, so I decided to test you by calling myself Harrison Black. I'm used to being called Harry, so I made it Harrison. Black was the name of my godfather and I actually have a legal right to the name, so I took that as my surname. It helped that it's also a common Muggle name. Ergo, Harrison Black was born." He took a deep breath and added, "But yes, the name my parents gave me was Harry James Potter."

Sirius seemed to stagger a moment as his eyes widened at the confirmation. "You are the prongslet? My godson, Harry?"

"No, Mr. Black. Your godson perished. I am a very different Harry Potter."

"That's why the summoning worked on you," said Snape quietly. "Instead of Longbottom's blood, Sebastian Potter's blood was used."

He pinned the young man with sharp obsidian eyes. "What happened in your world? You said your version of Lord Slytherin was killed."

"I killed him," said the young man quietly. "There was a prophecy. Now, I don't believe in prophecies; they can be made to mean anything, they can be twisted and misinterpreted dozens of ways, even after everyone agrees that they've been fulfilled. Unfortunately, Riddle believed in this one."

"Let's sit down, shall we," said Dumbledore quietly. "And perhaps you'll share your story with us?"

They all sat and waited for Harry to begin again. "One of Riddle's followers heard most of the prophecy and gave it to his master. It could have fit either the Potter baby or the Longbottom baby. The Potters were under a Fidelius charm, but their secret keeper betrayed them."

Sirius' voice was outraged and he demanded, "Who would do that?"

"In my world, it was..." he looked at the man in question, "Peter Pettigrew."

Peter's eyes widened in shock. "No, that can't be! I would never betray James and Lily and I loved Harry." His face was distorted with horror and disbelief.

"That's why you were so upset when you found out Peter was a friend of the Potters," Albus said with understanding.

"That and he tortured me while I was Voldemort's prisoner. But I'm trying hard to separate the people from my world from the people in yours." He looked at the grief-stricken Peter Pettigrew and added, "I know that you didn't betray them, Peter. Unfortunately, the Peter in my world was a marked Death Eater and gave the location of my parent's house to Riddle. Riddle killed my father first who was trying to buy time for my mother to get away with me. Riddle made it upstairs and told my mother to step aside; she wouldn't and tried to protect me. He AK'd her next. Then when he tried to AK me, it rebounded back and destroyed him...or so it seemed. That world's Pettigrew came upstairs, saw the corpses, took his master's wand and escaped."

Severus was comparing this new information to what they had already learned of the young man. "Of course...your medical history showed the Killing Curse, but we assumed you were in the backwash of it; perhaps a parent was holding you when he or she was killed."

"No, it hit me directly and I survived. Unknown to me for the next decade, I became famous as..." he used his fingers to make imaginary quote marks, "...the Boy-Who-Lived." His disgust at the title was evident on his face and in his voice.

Sirius shook his head in shocked amazement, "I wonder how you were able to survive the killing curse."

"My world's Dumbledore said that it was my mother's love that saved me," Harry said quietly.

Albus looked incredulous. "Is that what you believed Harry," he asked.

Harry shook his head. "My Mum wasn't the only mother Riddle killed who was trying to protect a child. Yet I'm still the only one who survived the Killing Curse, so I think he was...mistaken. Or at the very least, he understated what happened."

"It's more likely that he jumped to a conclusion so high that he needed a Levitation Charm to reach it," Albus stated scornfully. "Are you sure your Headmaster wasn't suffering from Dementia or a mind curse? He certainly sounds like it." He shook his head. "I'm sorry, please excuse my interruption and continue with your story."

"Anyway, my Sirius came to the house after it was all over and found Hagrid taking me away. He demanded that Hagrid turn me over because he was my godfather and my parent's first choice to raise me if they died. But you know that Hagrid would never violate an order from the great Albus Dumbledore." He paused to glare at this world's Dumbledore, who grimaced slightly. "So Sirius gave Hagrid his flying motorcycle to make the trip easier and decided to go after Pettigrew. When he caught up to him, Pettigrew made it sound like Sirius was the betrayer, then cast a blasting curse at the street and blew up a Muggle gas line. More than a dozen Muggles died.

Pettigrew escaped in his rat form and Sirius was taken to Azkaban as a Death Eater and mass murderer."

Peter groaned as if ill and put his face in his hands.

"But surely Sirius' innocence came out at his trial," protested Dumbledore.

"What trial? They snapped his wand without Priory Incantatum and threw him in Azkaban where he went partially insane over the next twelve years."

"But...my counterpart...wasn't he Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot? And if Sirius was one of the Order...he should have insisted on a trial."

"Yes, he should have" agreed Harry quietly.

Sirius stared at the young man in shock and a bit of horror at hearing his other self went to Azkaban. He shook the thought out of his mind and focused on the teen. "Harry, what happened to you," he asked softly watching his pseudo-godson's face carefully.

"Dumbledore decided that whatever protection my mother gave me could be extended by living with her blood relative. Apparently he made some form of blood wards around their property."

"Blood relative? Lily's parents were dead and..." his eyes widened again and then he laid a hand across them. "Tooney. Please, please don't tell me you were sent to Petunia."

"Petunia and Vernon Dursley and their amazing son, Dudley. A very normal family thank you very much, who had an absolute loathing for anything magical and therefore abnormal, including me. They treated me like a house elf and kept me in a closet until I received my Hogwarts letter."

"But..." Dumbledore was shaking his head, "Children's Services should have been involved. Even if my counterpart was concerned about Riddle's followers, you should have been processed by Children's Services and your home care supervised."

"My Dumbledore just assured everyone I was well taken care of and the rest of the world was happy to believe that. The war was over and they were delighted to celebrate having a young hero without having to worry about him. I was raised believing my parents were unemployed deadbeats who died drunk in a car accident. I was deliberately kept ignorant of anything to do with the wizarding world or my heritage."

"So you never knew anything about your parents, Black or that you were a wizard?" questioned Snape.

"Correct. In fact, the only memory I have of my parents is when I'm near Dementors; then I hear them dying."

"Why were you so fascinated by me and Snape tweaking each other earlier?" asked Sirius, trying to drive the pain away from the teen's face.

"You two hated each other in my world. In fact, as much as I loved my Sirius, I learned that he was a bully in school. You...he hated everything Slytherin and the Marauders targeted Slytherins for most of their pranks, and Severus particularly. And not just good-natured pranks, many of them were designed to be humiliating and mean-spirited."

Sirius looked shocked at this. "But...Dumbledore would have tanned our hides. He would never have allowed us to hurt or humiliate anyone, and if he didn't know about it, Minerva would have found out and punished us twice as badly."

"Apparently the Marauders were so charming; they could get away with it." He frowned and then added, "Even attempted murder."

"What?"

"You deliberately set up a situation where Snape would follow you...to the Shrieking Shack...on the night of the full moon."

Sirius paled and his arms clutched the sides of the chair. "But Remus...Remus would have attacked him. He could have been killed or turned." He looked physically ill. "And then Remus would have been euthanized by the Ministry!"

Harry met his eyes and nodded slowly. "Fortunately, my father turned into Prongs and saved the young Severus and gave him a chance to get away."

Black hung his head, his hands gripping the chair arms until his knuckles turned white. "Your Sirius was expelled, wasn't he? Mrs. Potter must have been so ashamed of him. She took him into their home and this is how he repaid them?" He turned horrified eyes to Snape. "You know I would never have done that, don't you? I would never put you in a position to be attacked by a werewolf!"

To Harry's surprise, Snape patted...patted! the other man's shoulder silently.

Harry remained silent until Sirius' rants subsided. "Harry," urged Dumbledore, "what did my counterpart do in the face of this situation?"

"Gave a month's worth of detentions to Sirius and took points off of Severus for being out after curfew."

"WHAT?" All four men were stunned and horrified at this behavior.

"When I questioned the Headmaster, he told me that suspending or expelling Sirius would have exposed Remus as being dangerous and the Ministry would have put him down as a danger to society."

Dumbledore stared at Harry in consternation. "But...that action or lack of action would have sent the message that Severus wasn't important, that his death wouldn't have mattered, that Remus was of greater consequence than Severus. It would have reinforced your Sirius' belief that treating Slytherins with contempt and even violence was somehow acceptable and that harmful actions could be excused by calling them pranks."

"Correct on all counts," Harry said coldly. Albus looked physically ill at the teen's merciless response.

"What was my counterpart's reaction?" asked Snape in a steady but quiet voice.

"You were already angry and bitter by being the target of the Marauder's continual pranks, and the lack of action by the staff. The

response after this encounter left you soul-wounded with deep feelings of betrayal. You had been persistently targeted by bullies and they charmed their way out of punishment. You learned that you couldn't trust the Leader of the Light and turned more towards the dark. In the end, you joined Riddle."

Snape's face twisted in disgust. "My counterpart was one of those...Death Eaters? But didn't you describe them as murdering terrorists who thought nothing of torturing and raping their victims?"

"Yes, to both questions. Your counterpart was also the one who overheard part of the prophecy and told Riddle. However, when Riddle targeted the Potters, his affection for Lily caused him to go to Dumbledore and he begged him to keep them safe. He then became a spy for the Light and was responsible for most of the Light's information in the second war."

"The second war?"

"Riddle became incorporeal for over a decade after killing my parents when the killing curse rebounded on him. He possessed animals and the occasional human until he burned them out. Pettigrew brought him back in a ritual using the bone of his father, my forcibly taken blood and Pettigrew's voluntarily given hand. He gained a new body, although it was quite a few serpentine characteristics."

Peter looked physically ill, but managed to ask, "Why did he use your blood?"

Harry sighed and rubbed his eyes. "Riddle possessed our DADA professor in my First Year and tried to kill me several times." He looked at Snape and added, "Your counterpart despised me as my father's son, but still saved me more than once. However, I was stupid and rushed into a confrontation with him at the end of the year, and my mother's protection burned his host's body. Once he used my blood in his resurrection ritual, my mother's protection no longer worked against him."

Sirius shook his head as if trying to understand so much in such a short time. "So you were some type of celebrity because you survived the killing curse, you were placed with Muggles who despised you because of your magic, you were totally ignorant of

the wizarding world until immediately before attending Hogwarts and then you were nearly murdered by Riddle or his minions on multiple occasions?"

"Yeah, that's about it. I almost died to the possessed Quirrell in my first year, to his horcrux in my Second year, to Dementors in my third year, the Tri-Wizard Tournament and the blood ritual in my Fourth...yeah, school wasn't very pleasant for me. Of course, it was still better than living with the Dursleys. At least I was fed here."

Peter's face twisted in horror at the teen's last statement before he asked, "When are you going to tell James and Lily?"

"I don't know if I ever will. I'm not their son, Peter. Knowing me won't show them how their son would have turned out. Their son would never have been abused, systematically manipulated, targeted and tortured. The man I am today is likely to be far from what their son would have been. Sebastian is probably closer to how your Harry would have been than I will ever be."

Sirius stared at him with shocked eyes. "But...they deserve to know, don't you think?"

"Sirius, remember what happened when you cast the Reducto on me?" Sirius cringed at the memory. "I'm not a healthy man. I was tortured almost beyond healing and was then taken away from everyone I still knew that could have helped me recover."

"I believe Mr. Potter is saying that he has not yet recovered from his recent traumas to introduce another one," clarified Severus calmly.

Harry smiled briefly at the man for understanding. "Exactly. I don't think I can handle any more...what does Preston call it...emotional instability. I need you to respect that decision."

"OK, Harry. I understand, but I hope you'll let me get to know you better. I owe it to my counterpart to look after you." He paused as a look of intense pain and grief flickered over the teen's face. "My counterpart...your Sirius...he's dead, isn't he?"

"All of you are dead in my world," replied Harry woodenly. "You fell through the Veil in the Hall of Mysteries fighting Bellatrix. You named me your heir, which is why I have a legal right to the name of

Black. Voldemort gave Peter a silver hand to replace the one he cut off for the ritual, but it strangled him when he hesitated to kill me because of a life debt. Severus was killed by Riddle's snake familiar. Albus was dying from both a curse and drinking poison, and when the child of a DE was ordered to kill him, he asked Severus to do it to save the other boy's soul."

Severus gasped in horror, the shock breaking through his normal mask. "My counterpart deliberately killed Albus?"

"He asked you to do it. And considering the pain from the curse and the poison, it was a blessing to him really. But it made your life even more difficult with everyone else, although it cemented you firmly in Riddle's Inner Circle." Severus leaned forward and covered his face with his hands. After what Harry had seen earlier, he wasn't surprised when Sirius leaned over and gripped his shoulder in silent support.

Albus shook his head in despair. "He asked a man who was already giving his all as a spy to kill him? He thought it was better to emotionally and spiritually hurt Severus to save someone else? Why did he continually put so little value on Severus' life and well-being?"

Harry looked at the shaken elderly wizard and slowly shook his head. "I can't explain your counterpart's motives and manipulations, sir. He hurt many people because he thought their sacrifices were better for the good of the many. Although he told me once that he made mistakes like the next man, but being cleverer than most men, his mistakes tended to be correspondingly greater."

Dumbledore closed his eyes and shook his head. "I am amazed that you speak to me at all, Mr. Black," he finally managed.

Harry gave a huff of laughter that held little humor, but responded, "Well, Fawkes stayed with him through it all, so he probably isn't quite as appalling as I portray him. However, at least you know understand why I was somewhat distant and terse when I first arrived."

"After everything you've gone through, I think we would forgive you if you ran naked through the streets dyed hot pink and announcing the second coming of Merlin," muttered Sirius.

"Don't even think about it," warned Harry with narrowed eyes at the former Marauder.

OoOoOoOo

Chapter 11 – Murderer or Maligned Aristocrat?

"Have you finished your character profiles," asked Salazar with a hint of a smirk on his painted features. After the Malfoy ball, he had questioned Harry extensively on who he had met; what they had talked about; how each was dressed and with whom they associated. The Slytherin insisted that Harry begin a journal with a chapter for each Family and at least one page for each Family member. "Include their political leanings, their primary source of income, their allies and enemies, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. You'll be able to add to it as time goes by, until you'll have an accurate profile that will help you determine how to best approach and treat each person."

"Manipulate them, you mean," groused Harry, although he could see the benefit in having such journals, especially since this world was so very different from his own.

"Influence and persuade them," countered Salazar calmly. "For example, let us suppose that you wished to limit monopolies and decided to approach several Wizengamot members for support. Would it not be to your advantage to recognize that the Family of the member you first intended to approach owned the most farms in Britain and might be fundamentally opposed to such a restriction? Or that the second member you planned to approach had marital ties to the first Family? Being aware of your peers as well as what is important to them only adds to your strength."

Harry grumbled, "I know, but it's like taking up a new hobby and not really enjoying it. It takes a lot of time and effort with no immediate benefit."

"Even so, you will humor me in this," stated Salazar with a slight smile that grew as Harry drew the journal towards him again.

An hour later, Harry closed the journal with a sigh. "Salazar," he began tentatively and looked up at the portrait, which raised a dark eyebrow at him. "What do you think about permitting Severus Snape and Albus Dumbledore down into the Chamber? When Snape heard about the Chamber and Shasanae, he was quite excited about it and immediately asked if he could see it. The Headmaster also expressed an interest."

The image of the Founder frowned in thought. What benefit did this give to his protégé? Or would he be giving away a valuable article of trade for no gain? No, he decided, it would further reduce the stigma of Harry being a parselmouth because only by being one could the two staff members gain entrance to his Chamber. In addition, he wanted Shasanae protected, and the Headmaster would be able to provide that protection as long as he was convinced that the basilisk was a guardian of the school.

"Very well," Salazar said slowly. "I can perceive benefit in them visiting the Chamber and meeting Shasanae. In addition, they will owe you an unspoken debt for making such a visit possible."

Harry burst out laughing and shook his head at the Founder. "You are such a Slytherin, Salazar!"

The portrait again arched an eyebrow at him. "It has taken you this long to realize that? I fear I may have misjudged your intellect after all." Even so, his lips twitched at hearing the genuine amusement in the young man's laughter.

"He was so graceful," enthused Lavender Brown in a husky whisper. "When he held me in his arms, I thought I might fall in a faint, except that he's so strong, he held me up."

"Even with the scars down his face, he's very handsome," added Susan Bones. "And he looked so elegant; if I didn't know better, I would have thought him a scion of an old and wealthy pureblood Family." She paused to smile at the memory of the handsome young man. "Even my Aunt Amelia liked him; said he was 'quite the charmer', and she's not easily impressed."

"I saw that he danced with both Greengrass sisters. I wonder if they're interested in him," whispered Lavender in a dreamy voice. She wouldn't mind seeing Harrison Black join the Brown Family; after all even their names were compatible!

Holly Potter pouted slightly as she listened to the girls who continued to go into raptures over having danced with Harrison Black. She looked over at Madame Pince, but so far the Librarian hadn't heard them, or at least hadn't sent them any glares. "I don't know why he didn't come back to dance with me," she sulked. "He

danced with my Mum, but I was gone when they were done and he just continued making the rounds of the room."

"You missed out on something special," purred Lavender with a self-satisfied expression.

"Well, at least I see him regularly in Quidditch practice," Holly responded with a smug look. "He gives us quite a bit of individual attention, you know."

Rolanda Hooch covered her hand with her mouth and quickly walked away from the book rack near the table in the library where the girls were gossiping over her young assistant. She would have to be sure he was aware of it at lunch, she decided with a visible smirk. She made a bet with herself whether his blush or his expression would be more amusing.

Harry sat back in his chair and watched the flames in the fireplace dance and whirl. The days following the ball had been difficult. Seeing Lord Slytherin had brought back quite a few feelings about the self-styled Lord Voldemort. Thank goodness for Preston and Salazar.

"There's hardly any Voldemort in him," Harry tried to explain to Preston. "He's not insane, like my world's Voldemort was. And he's still human looking. And has the manners of a pureblood, even though he's a half-blood like me."

"If Professor Snape continued the traditions of Professor Slughorn, the Slytherin Head of House before him, I wouldn't be surprised if he attended etiquette lessons," stated Preston. Horace Slughorn was quite adamant that all of his Slytherins needed to be able to walk, eat, dress and speak with poise and elegance. He would have stayed in those classes until Slughorn or the House Prefects approved his performance."

Harry shook his head in amazement. "Do you know what I would have given for something like that when I was eleven and first came to Hogwarts? I knew nothing! I didn't know a single tradition. I didn't know how to hold a quill or how to write an essay. I certainly didn't know how to 'walk, eat, dress and speak with poise and elegance.' Hell, I would have been happy just to have clothes that fit me!"

Preston made a mental note that they would need to begin to address Harry's Muggle, once he was certain the young man could function adequately after the trauma he experienced at the hands of his torturers.

"I held it together while I talked to him, but afterwards...I had a semi-flashback. It wasn't reliving everything, but the feelings were overwhelming. I was shaking pretty badly, and was glad for the shadows on the balcony."

"That's understandable, Harry," replied Preston calmly. "He may have held his head a certain way, or his tone may have triggered a memory. Just the fact that you were able to attend the ball with so many people is an enormous step forward. That you were able to converse with people who bear the same face as those that harmed you is remarkable and I am sincerely impressed. Facing Lord Slytherin unexpectedly and maintaining your composure until the conversation was over is extraordinary and I am very proud of the progress you've made in such a short time."

"I think the potion is responsible for a great deal," Harry admitted. "It really did dull some of the worst memories. I mean, I know they happened, but I feel just a bit removed from them."

"This is exactly what it is designed to do; allow you to come to terms with what happened without having the constant terror and feelings of desperation."

Harry nodded and sipped his tea. "You know, he said he should invite me to tea. Do you think he actually will?"

"I don't actually know Lord Slytherin personally," Preston replied, "but he doesn't strike me as the type of man to make gratuitous comments. How will you feel if you do receive an invitation?"

"Panicked," Harry said honestly. "I can't imagine being in a closed room with him."

"Then why don't we work on your Occlumency? Being a strong Occlumens will give you the ability to maintain your composure." At Harry's nod, the man continued, "I want you to close your eyes and breathe deeply. Imagine a clear blue sky, the perfect weather for a Quidditch game..."

Harry smiled at the memory. Preston was a source of strength and tranquility in the turbulent world in which he found himself. He even helped him work through his emotions about this Peter Pettigrew being so different from the one who betrayed his parents, helped bring Voldemort back to life and joined in on the tortures. It had been an incredible surprise when he hesitated at Voldemort command to crush his windpipe. Apparently the silver hand made by the Dark Lord considered that pause treachery and caused it to strangle the rat.

"This Peter knew that the Burrow was going to be destroyed and was frantic to get the news to Dumbledore or someone who could do something about it. I wonder if he's Dumbledore's spy with the Blood Purists." Harry thought a moment longer and then murmured, "And does that mean Snape isn't a spy at all in this world?"

"Are you speaking to me," asked Salazar's portrait with humor in his voice, "or are you holding a conversation with yourself?"

"Talking to myself again, Salazar. I was just thinking that if this Snape had never been targeted by the Marauders, and if he wasn't disillusioned and betrayed by the so-called Leader of the Light, then maybe he never turned to the Dark Arts. He's still a snarky git, but this Snape is a decent snarky git."

"From what I've gathered from the other portraits, Severus Snape is perceived as being a hard taskmaster, but fair. His tongue can be sharp, but he isn't deliberately cruel to his students. Of course, any Potions Master has to be sharp-tongued to make sure no student is injured or killed with so many volatile ingredients in the class room. Merlin only knows how much I wanted to cane a few of my students, but the school Charter forbade it."

"Cane your students?" Harry stared at the portrait with horror clearly written across his face.

The portrait rolled its eyes. "This was one thousand years ago, Mr. Potter-Black. Corporal punishment was the norm at that time. Rowena and Helga were the ones that insisted on physical chores during detentions instead of corporal punishment, although I am quite certain that even they spanked a few of their younger students on more than one occasion."

Harry shook his head in amazement, glad that he lived in a different age than the Founders, although he supposed that they were fairly progressive from the perspective of the era in which they lived.

"Isn't it almost time for your Charms lesson," asked Salazar with a pointed look at the clock.

Harry sighed and took a few moments to practice his meditation techniques again before facing the school and the pack of giggling school girls that seemed to stalk his every movement.

Harry held the venom that Shasanae had donated for two weeks before deciding to visit the apothecary about selling a vial. He didn't want to flood the market, but perhaps one vial a month wouldn't be too much. Of course, he could let the apothecary know he would be willing to entertain special orders for greater amounts. That might even help uncover some of the shadier miscreants supporting the Blood Purists. He could always demand that large orders detail how the venom would be used.

"Harry!" The teen paused and made sure to keep a pleasant smile on his face as he turned to see the DADA professor rapidly approaching him on the Diagon Alley sidewalk. He was a little surprised to see Peter Pettigrew accompanying the man, but perhaps being seen with Sirius Black only helped his spy activities.

"Good afternoon, Professor," Harry nodded at Sirius, "and Mr. Pettigrew."

"None of that, Harry," responded Sirius with a chuckle. "It's bad enough that the students call me that, but you're older and you certainly have a better reason to call me Sirius than most teens."

"I would be pleased if you would call me Peter," added the smaller man hesitantly. He was still uncomfortable around the teen knowing what his counterpart had done to the younger man. Truth be told, if he were Harry he wouldn't allow the clone of his parent's betrayer anywhere near him, much less someone who had personally used an Unforgiveable on him. He was still shaken that any Peter Pettigrew could behave detestably.

Harry sincerely hoped that the two men didn't see him as a replacement for the long-dead Harry Potter of their world. He knew his Sirius was dead and he had no intention of replacing him with this look-alike. However, they were trying hard to be pleasant and he did feel a bit lonely in this world, even with Preston and Salazar. Perhaps it would work out. "Very well, Sirius and Peter it is," he replied with a small smile.

"What brings you to Diagon Alley this afternoon," asked Sirius as he matched his steps to the younger man.

Harry looked up under his fringe towards his pseudo-godfather and smirked to hide the pain of the memory of Sirius and James attacking him for being a parselmouth. "I have some basilisk venom to sell to the apothecary," he responded coolly. "Shasanae was kind enough to donate several vials beyond what I gave to Professor Snape."

A slow flush started at the other man's neck and slowly rose up through his face. He ducked his head and stared at his feet for a long moment. "Harry, I am still sorry and embarrassed, but most of all, I am deeply and sincerely repentant for what I said about you being a parselmouth. I have no excuse other than I was behaving like a bigoted idiot. You've been nothing except tolerant of us, and I repaid that with suspicions and insults. I hope you'll be able to forgive me some day."

Harry stopped and looked at the man, who raised remorseful gray eyes to his. He nodded and said, "Don't do it again, or I'll let Peter have his way with you."

The smaller man appeared surprised, and then a slow and somewhat malicious smile tugged at his lips. Sirius looked at his fellow Marauder and swallowed audibly. "Right then." His eyes darted between the two and then he twitched and muttered.

Harry looked over at Peter and asked, "Did he just say something about pudding and Minerva McGonagall?" Peter's grin turned even more malevolent as he nodded with evident satisfaction. Harry decided that perhaps this Peter was a true Marauder after all and not just a hanger-on. "Remind me not to irritate you either."

The older man sobered abruptly. "Actually Harry, I wanted to ask whether you would like me to make an oath never to betray the Potters or you. I know my counterpart did some heinous acts, and I'll be happy to offer my oath if it will help you accept me as being different from him." He spit the last word with disgust.

"The fact that you stood up to your friends and defended both Remus and me showed me you're two totally different people. He didn't have the courage to stand up like that." Peter shook his head sadly but added softly, "Thank you, Harry."

The two men followed Harry as he sold one flask of basilisk venom to the apothecary, and tried to ignore the sheer number of galleons the transaction generated. He also suggested that he might be able to obtain larger quantities if the price was right. As they walked out of the shop, Sirius said, "Can we buy you dinner? The Leaky Cauldron is nearby, but I would recommend The Fat Duck for something a bit more appetizing."

Harry decided to be daring and try The Fat Duck, a restaurant he didn't remember from his world. Compared to the dark shabbiness of the Leaky Cauldron, this restaurant was nothing less than magnificent. A grand staircase descended to the main dining room, which featured high ceilings, gilded chandeliers, a carved stone fireplace, hand-painted china and a golden harp that provided delightful background music.

The maître d', a small impeccably dressed man hurried forward to greet them with a bow. "Welcome, Lord Black, it is a delight to welcome you again to our humble establishment. I have a fine table for you and your party." He took them to a corner table that looked out at the other diners, but had an air of intimacy about it. "I hope you will enjoy your meal."

Harry raised an eyebrow at Sirius, who chuckled and said, "What can I say? It's good being the Head of an Ancient and Noble House. Besides, the ladies love this place, so I'm here frequently. In fact, I recommend the Chef's Choice. I've never regretted choosing that." They all agreed and allowed the Chef to select their meal.

Over their first course of shrimp bisque poured over a light bacon custard, Peter asked a question that had been causing him curiosity. "Harry, I know that you said all of us had died in your world, and I'm

sincerely sorry for your loss. I just wondered about the other Marauder, Remus Lupin. You haven't mentioned him." Sirius looked up, startled at assuming the man had suffered the same fate in the other world and suddenly realizing that perhaps he hadn't.

Harry smile with genuine affection. "Remus Lupin was still alive and well when I was captured by Voldemort. In fact, he was my Third Year DADA professor, and from what I understood, the best one in years. He taught me how to cast the Patronus charm." He smiled again at the memory.

"In your Third Year? That's very impressive! Of course, Remus would have made a good professor," stated Peter. "I always thought he was a Ravenclaw in Gryffindor colors."

"And was he..." Sirius waved his hand, not quite sure how to ask about Remus' lycanthropy.

"He still had his furry little problem in my world, but that didn't keep him from being a wonderful man," said Harry quietly as he savored the sweet and smoky flavors of the soup. "He was even-tempered, patient, kind, and gentle, although he didn't play too many pranks by the time I knew him. I think his life was a bit too hard to keep the prankster in him going."

The soup was removed and replaced with flounder, served on a white corn puree and topped with a black truffle essence. Harry took a bite and smile at the light flavor. "Before I left, your cousin was trying to convince him that his monthly changes were no worse than her own monthly cycle."

Sirius coughed on the bite of fish. "My cousin..." He looked at Harry and shook his head in confusion, not certain to whom he referred.

"Nymphadora Tonks, Andromeda's daughter, had a thing for Moony and was actively pursuing him. He was being all noble and self-sacrificing saying that no woman should tie herself to a werewolf, but she wasn't having any of that."

"Ha, that's my Dora! She sees what she wants and she goes for it, although I never would have put her and Moony together. She's at least ten years younger than him."

They spent the rest of that course exchanging stories about Moony, the pranks he played and his embarrassment over being a werewolf. Harry enjoyed listening to the two Marauders regale him with stories about their old friend, but couldn't help feeling a pang of homesickness thinking about the gentle werewolf.

They had moved on to the rest of Sirius' family by the time the main dish was served. They interrupted the conversation for the waiter to announce, "The Chef's choice for the entrée this evening is two different cuts of Kobe Beef. The first is a strip steak while the second is a short-braised rib roast, both served with a sherry jus. This is accompanied by asparagus in Hollandaise sauce."

"Did you meet my brother in your world," asked Sirius around a bite of his steak after the waiter departed.

"Regulus? No, I'm afraid he had passed away by the time I got to know my world's Sirius. He originally joined the Death Eaters, but then turned on Voldemort when he realized just what the Dark Lord was willing to do to achieve his goals. He even stole a key artifact critical to the Dark Lord's immortality, but he died doing so. You...or rather your counterpart never told me too much about him."

"My little brother was Death Eater in your world?" He frowned at the thought. "He was always ambitious in our world, a true Slytherin. Since I was the elder and Heir, he elected to go into politics here and is loosely aligned with Lord Slytherin, although he's also allied himself with Lucius Malfoy on some legislation as well."

Over the Chef's chosen dessert of poached pears with white chocolate sauce, Harry turned to Peter and asked, "What about you, Peter? What is your background and what are you doing these days? Was your Marauder name Wormtail like your counterpart in my world?"

Sirius exploded with a bark of laughter and had to cover his mouth to keep from spewing his dessert over the table. "Wormtail? WORMTAIL? Oh that's definitely a better Marauder name than Twitch!"

The smaller man glared at Sirius. "Don't even think about it, Padfoot or you'll find yourself infested with fleas quicker than you can say 'bath'."

Sirius tried to control his laughter, but continued to snicker every few seconds, which Peter determinedly ignored. "Well Harry, there's not much to tell about me. My parents were both magical, but not particularly powerful. I was the first of the family to get a Hogwarts letter. James saw that I was alone, and corralled me into his band of misfits."

Sirius huffed at the description, but then mouthed "Wormtail" and began snickering again.

Peter continued, "In our Second Year, we realized the truth about Remus and we decided to try to become animagi, so he wouldn't be alone in his transformations. By Fifth Year, we all managed it. Fortunately Prongs and Padfoot were big enough to keep Moony in check, because my form was a rat. While great for scoping out areas, I couldn't do much to control a werewolf. Because of the whisker-twitching, my Marauder name was Twitch." When Sirius began snickering again, Peter waved his wand under the table with a mumbled incantation and abruptly the dark-haired man began scratching frantically.

"OK, OK, I'm sorry. I won't call you Wormtail again," he exclaimed as he ran his nails over every part of his body he could reach. Peter looked doubtful, but Sirius quickly cried, "Marauder's honor!" With that, Peter waved his wand again and mouthed an incantation and Sirius breathed a sigh of relief before glaring at the smaller man and muttering "Twit".

Peter smiled benevolently and replied, "Twerp."

"Git."

"Gimboid."

"Enough," laughed Harry. He turned to Peter and added, "So you're going to teach me that flea spell, right? I'm sure I'm going to need it eventually."

Sirius' groaned and banged his head down on the table.

"Do you happen to have a few moments for me, Mr. Black," Harry heard as he left the Library. He turned to see the Albus Dumbledore approaching him.

"Certainly, Headmaster. My next class to audit isn't for another ninety minutes." Harry thought the man was going to ask about accessing the Chamber of Secrets again but he was surprised when they reached the Headmaster's office and the man put up a complex silencing ward.

"Mr. Potter, when Mr. Pettigrew revealed your name through that ingenious map the boys created while students, you said something that caught my attention."

"I think I would prefer that you use 'Black' as my surname, Headmaster. I don't want you slipping up in front of someone who doesn't know, after all."

Albus nodded his agreement, but then continued, "You mentioned that you almost died to a professor possessed by your Voldemort in your First Year and to his horcrux in your Second Year." The older wizard looked over his spectacles at the younger man.

Harry raised his Occlumency shields and reinforced them, but he felt no tickle of Legilimens in his mind. "And your question, Sir?"

"You also said before then that your world's Riddle had undergone some particularly foul rituals. I am unfortunately familiar with the concept of soul anchors or horcruxes. Was this his key to near immortality in your world?"

"Headmaster, that is a subject I would prefer never leave this office. The fewer people that know such a vile ritual is possible, the better as far as I am concerned."

"I totally agree Mr. Black, which is why I raised such powerful wards around the room before we began speaking."

Harry drew a deep breath and then said quietly, "Yes, Riddle created multiple horcruxes, mostly using artifacts belonging to Hogwarts Founders. He used Hufflepuff's chalice, Ravenclaw's diadem and Slytherin's locket and ring among other things. However, when I met Lord Slytherin at the Malfoy ball, I noticed that he was

wearing Slytherin's locket and could tell it didn't have the same aura of evil around it, so I don't think this world's Riddle has done anything like that." The Headmaster seemed to relax a fraction and smiled in relief at the younger man.

"May I ask you a couple of questions, Sir?" At Albus' hand wave to continue, Harry asked, "Were you the one to bring young Tom Riddle his letter and was it to an orphanage?"

"Yes, I delivered it and told him that he was a wizard." His eyes became unfocused as he remembered the occasion all those years ago. "I found the boy's magic surprisingly well developed for such a young wizard, especially that he had a measure of control over his magic. I took him to Diagon Alley for his supplies and described how to find platform 9 and $\frac{3}{4}$."

"And at Hogwarts?"

"Once he arrived at Hogwarts, I tried to watch out for the boy. When he asked Headmaster Dippet to stay at Hogwarts during the summer to avoid returning to the orphanage and was denied, I worked with Horace Slughorn to find a wizarding family among the Slytherins to foster him for the summers. The Lestranges took him in; Rainard Lestrangle was a school mate of young Tom and they became good friends."

Harry blinked in surprise. What that the difference? Instead of sending him back to the bleak and abusive orphanage, two teachers worked to find an alternative for him? Did that cause the divergence from what happened in his world over the next six years of Riddle's schooling? No horcrux, no released basilisk, no murdered Myrtle just because two adults cared enough to find him better living arrangements? Amazing!

The next day a letter arrived at breakfast sealed with an impressive crest prominently featuring a serpent. Harry checked it over for magic before opening it as he always did and shook out the contents. Rather than a normal letter, it was revealed as a rectangular piece of thick, stiff parchment. Elaborate gilded script presented the invitation.

You are cordially invited to an

intimate gathering for tea

at Slytherin Manor at 3:00 o'clock
on the afternoon of the sixth of March.
Répondez s'il vous plaît

This invitation will act as a port key if you choose to accept.

If not, please burn this invitation to destroy the port key.

It was signed Lord Slytherin and embossed with the Slytherin family crest.

Harry abruptly pushed his chair away from the table with a mumbled excuse and left through the staff exit, not noticing the questioning looks that followed him.

As soon as the door shut in his quarters, Harry began yelling, "Salazar! He actually did it! Your bloody many times grandson actually invited me to a bloody tea party!"

"Excellent," the portrait replied smugly. "This will prove to be an admirable opportunity for you."

"I don't want it to be an 'admirable opportunity'. I want to be left alone. I don't know if he's evil incarnate like his counterpart only sane, which makes him more dangerous; or whether he's a respectable but maligned aristocrat."

Salazar smirked at the young pacing wizard. "Why do you assume he's not both? If he is truly a Slytherin, and the genealogy you read to me did appear plausible, then he could be both dangerous and respectable, both a member of the aristocracy and immoral or somewhere in between."

Harry sat heavily in the chair nearest the fireplace and stared at the portrait before resting his elbows on his knees and covering his face. "I'm doomed," he muttered. "Totally and absolutely doomed."

"Perhaps," the portrait replied cheerfully. "Now tell me what you know about the etiquette for a tea party."

Harry raised his face from his hands. "There's etiquette for attending a tea party? You don't just go, drink a couple cups of tea and leave?"

Salazar smirked at the young man and then took on what Harry thought of as his 'teaching voice'. "When attending a tea, there are a few courtesies to be observed. As each guest arrives, they will be seated and should politely converse as they wait for other guests to arrive. Once all the guests have arrived, the host or hostess will be seated. At that time, he or she will remove their napkin from the table and place it on their lap. You will then do the same. Since you were invited by Lord Slytherin and we are unaware of whether he has a châtelaine, we will assume a host for this discussion."

Harry shook his head. "Wait, a chatel-what?"

Salazar frowned at the interruption. "A châtelaine is the mistress of the home. Since Lord Slytherin is unmarried, he could have a spinster relative serve as his chatelaine, although his genealogy gave no indication of other relatives." The portrait sniffed and said, "If I may proceed?"

At Harry's embarrassed nod, he continued, "Regarding the napkin, when you have finished with your tea and meal, you should place your napkin to the right of the plate on the table. If for some reason you need to leave the table, you should place your napkin on your seat until you return."

"Next, you should realize that there is an order in which tea foods are to be eaten." He ignored Harry's groan of frustration and continued, "First are the scones or muffins, typically followed by the small sandwiches, and ending with the sweets. Take small bites when eating and never stuff the whole sandwich or dessert in your mouth even though it seems small enough. Also, when seated at a table, raise only the teacup to drink, not the saucer. Place the teacup gently back on the saucer." He ignored Harry rolling his eyes.

"Is that everything," asked Harry who was trying not to whine, but he wasn't a bloody girl and shouldn't have to attend bloody tea parties!

Salazar reviewed what had been said and then added, "Never slurp your tea; instead sip it quietly. Never dip a scone in jam or cream; instead break off bite size pieces and add the jam or cream in your

own plate. Scones are not to be eaten with a fork. Place all forks or spoons on their corresponding plates. Never lay a serving utensil on the tablecloth or table."

"When the tea party is over, the host will place his napkin on the table. At that time you should fold your napkin in half or quarters and neatly place it on the table to the right of your plate." The portrait thought for a moment and then said, "I think that should get you through the event without embarrassing yourself."

Harry stared at the portrait before covering his face once again. "I'm doomed," he repeated. "You want me to have tea with a possible murderer and to do it with a smile and refinement. I am completely and absolutely doomed."

His sense of disaster remained until the following morning when Preston came by for their discussion. "I'm not sure I'm going to be able to do this, Preston," the young man said. "My conversation with Slytherin only lasted a few minutes at the ball, but this will be much longer."

The Healer chuckled and said, "Would it help if someone you knew was also there?"

"Maybe, but it depends who. Hey, maybe you can accompany me?" He gave his best puppy-dog eyes to the older man who laughed and reached into an inner pocket of his robe and withdrew a rectangular-shaped piece of parchment.

"I'm not sure about accompanying you, but I received an invitation as well, so I will have your back," the Healer said calmly.

A broad smile broke over Harry's face and the tension left his frame for the first time in over twelve hours.

"The question is," remarked Salazar from above the fireplace, "whether the Healer was invited because of his connection to you. If so, how did he learn of it and did he deliberately invite him to give you a sense of comfort or for a different purpose?"

"I'm one of the healers supporting a children's charity that Lord Slytherin sponsors," Preston explained. The word is he's planning to

invite all of the healers at some point or another to small events to express his appreciation."

Harry banged his head against the back of his chair. "But we don't know for sure, do we? Is nothing normal in my life," he whined.

"No," responded both Preston and Salazar with matching smiles.

Shortly before three o'clock on the sixth of March, Harry felt the familiar sensation of a hook behind his navel as the port key activated. He stumbled as he landed, but was grateful that he didn't kiss the marble floor on which he found himself. "Welcome to my home, Mr. Black," sounded the silky and genteel tones Harry remembered from the Malfoy Ball.

Harry looked up and recognized the tall, handsome and impeccably dressed man. His host again wore the heavy gold locket with a serpentine "S" made of inlaid emeralds on his chest. The young man bowed as Salazar had taught him and replied, "You honor me, Lord Slytherin. It is I who must thank you for welcoming me into your magnificent home."

The dark brown eyes seemed to reflect both approval and perhaps slight amusement at Harry's response. He turned and indicated the doorway with an elegant movement. "Please join me in the Salon, Mr. Black. You are the last guest to arrive and I look forward to introducing you to the others."

Feeling both cautious and uneasy, Harry tried to appear nonchalant as he accompanied his host to the Salon. This turned out to be an enormous room boasting twenty-foot ceilings with elaborate trim and 18th century French furniture above the polished parquet floors. An elaborate marble fireplace was across from French doors leading out to a balcony. Several conversation seating areas were conveniently placed around the room, while a grand piano played softly by itself adding to the welcoming ambience.

His host led him to where four other guests and the introductions began. "This is Mr. Harrison Black, a young man of remarkable courage who fought against vandals in Diagon Alley. Mr. Black, allow me to introduce you to Madame Amelia Bones, Director of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement; Miss Abigail Fenetra, reporter for the Daily Oracle; Miss Alison MacFarlan, a newly

graduated solicitor who joined the firm of Jacobs, Elmridge and MacFarlan; and Miss Melinda Joyce, the very talented concert pianist."

Harry accepted the hand of each lady and brushed a kiss over the knuckle with an appropriate greeting, as Salazar had taught him. He had danced with Madame Bones at the Malfoy Ball and was pleased to see the stern woman again. Abigail Fenetra was a brown-haired woman in her thirties with a trim figure. Her eyes darted around as if she was examining everyone and was afraid to miss something. The attorney was blonde with blue eyes, tall and slender and Harry couldn't help but think Sirius would find her irresistible. The final woman, the pianist Melinda Joyce, had black hair and nearly black eyes, an hourglass figure with a brilliant smile.

"We are also pleased to have Mr. Ludovic Bagman from the Department of Magical Games and Sports and Healer Preston MacMillian of St. Mungo's."

Harry shook hands with both men. Like the Ludo Bagman in his own world, this former athlete was quite a bit thicker around the middle than he was in his Quidditch days. He smiled warmly at Preston and had to admit that the middle-aged healer looked very comfortable in the elegant Salon.

The four men and four women were seated at a round table near a full floor to ceiling window that allowed them to view the beautiful grounds. Lord Slytherin had Director Bones on his right and Miss Joyce on his left. Harry was seated next to the dark-haired pianist with Miss MacFarlane on his other side. Preston sat next to Director Bones across from Harry with Miss Fenetra on his right. Bagman sat between the solicitor and the reporter. After setting his Aunt's table so many times, Harry recognized the fine Wedgewood china that made up the place settings.

Although Harry didn't notice their host give a signal, attractively arranged platters appeared on the table filled with a variety of scones. Small crystal dishes were filled with Devonshire cream, flavored butters, as well as raspberry preserves, orange marmalade, and rose petal jam. Harry spread his napkin across his lap and made sure both ladies had selected their choices before he served himself.

As Slytherin spoke to Director Bones, Harry took the opportunity to ask, "Miss Joyce, I have not had the pleasure to hear you play as of yet. Who are your favorite composers for the piano?"

"It would be too difficult to select only a few composers, Mr. Black," she replied with a smile. "I favor Handel and Vivaldi for Baroque compositions, Mozart and Haydn for Classical arrangements, while Chopin and Liszt are my favorite Romantic composers. Each of them offers something unique."

"I have to admit that I'm only familiar with Handel's Messiah and the Coronation Anthems," Harry admitted.

Joyce's dark eyes lit with both amusement and passion for her subject. "Handel was sincerely admired by his peers. Mozart said of him that he understood affect better than any of their peers, while Beethoven said he was 'the master of us all'. Beethoven also said that Handel should be the example used when trying to learn how to achieve great effects by simple means."

When Slytherin turned his attention to the pianist, Harry turned to his left and addressed Miss MacFarlane. "Are you pleased to complete your education and embark upon your chosen career, Miss MacFarlane?"

The beautiful blond gave a deep chuckle and her blue eyes sparkled with mirth as she replied, "I sincerely doubt I will ever complete my education, Mr. Black. I will likely spend the remainder of my life learning new cases, new arguments and new methods of research."

"You will never be bored then, will you," Harry responded with a smile.

As everyone had finished the scones, another unseen signal replaced the remaining platters and exchanged their plates with clean ones. New platters filled with finger sandwiches appeared. Harry looked them over trying to identify what they each contained as he helped the ladies on either side of him reach their selections. He recognized ham and chopped watercress on rye bread and cucumber sandwiches with what appeared to be chopped mint, as well as chicken curry salad in mini tart shells. He wasn't certain of the other three.

"Ah, smoked salmon," said the solicitor with satisfaction as she picked up one of the open face half moon sandwiches. "And is that..." she took a triangle sandwich and smiled. "Yes, cinnamon cream cheese, how delightful. It's one of my favorites."

Miss Joyce selected the cucumber sandwich, which was open faced and round shaped as well as chopped egg with what appeared to be black olives that came as a pinwheel sandwich.

When the ladies were served, Harry selected a ham and watercress as well as one of the chicken curry salads in the mini tart shells. He was surprised to taste a bit of shredded coconut in the mix as well.

The conversation continued between Harry and the two ladies on his side, and following Salazar's instructions he made sure not to cross the table with his conversation or to speak around the ladies to the men on either side of them. He learned that Miss Joyce preferred Classical to Baroque, but Baroque to Romantic compositions. He also learned that Miss MacFarlane was joining her Grandfather's firm and was going to specialize in contract law. He met Preston's eyes across the table and gave a slight nod to indicate he was holding up all right in the presence of Riddle's counterpart, especially as he wasn't actually speaking with the man.

By the time dessert was served, Harry felt more at ease in the situation, but was also ready to return to Hogwarts and strip off the polite veneer he felt he was wearing. This type of gathering would never be a favorite. However, his mood was improved at seeing the array of almond macaroons, white chocolate truffles, chocolate-dipped strawberries, and mini éclairs that filled the table.

Finally, when the their host laid his napkin on the table, Harry folded his own napkin in half and placed it on the table to the right of his plate, following Salazar's instructions carefully. As Slytherin stood, Harry also stood and helped the ladies with their chairs. He had been warned there would be several minutes of polite conversation while standing before the first guest would take their leave.

Their host moved easily through his guests, speaking to each one in turn, giving them his individual attention. Coming to Harry he said pleasantly, "Mr. Black, rarely does a young man not raised in an Old Family present himself as commendably as you did this afternoon. I hope you will honor me with your presence again soon."

Harry gave the half-bow that Salazar had made him practice. "I thank you for opening your home to us this afternoon, Lord Slytherin. Compared to your other guests, I had little to offer even though I enjoyed myself."

The dark eyes examined him for a few moments and then a smile tugged at the older man's lips. "You intrigue me, Mr. Black. I looked forward to seeing you again." He accepted Harry's handshake and then turned to the next guest. Accepting the dismissal, Harry was pleased to return to the Floo room accompanied by Preston and Floo'd back to Hogwarts.

He again thanked Neville's grandmother for forcing him to learn how to exit a Floo as he walked out without stumbling and collapsed into the first chair he reached.

"Surely a simple tea party was not so exhausting as to cause you to fold in exhaustion," smirked the portrait.

Harry glared at the portrait of the Founder. "Sod off, Salazar. I wasn't raised to utter pretty meaningless phrases and to smirk and simper like you were."

"A Slytherin never simpers," Salazar retorted. "Everything else is a dance; the movement of the conversation, evaluating and making connections, the giving and gathering of information..." His smile turned positively evil as he said, "You should complete the entries in your character profiles while the information is still fresh in your mind."

Harry groaned and wondered whether an Incendio would destroy the portrait, but finally grudgingly retreated to his desk and pulled out the journal that contained the information that Salazar insisted he begin to gather.

He turned to Director Bone's page and noted the tea party and that she had been seated at Slytherin's right hand. He added a page for each of the other people, telling Salazar about them as he wrote.

"My many times great-grandson intrigues me," the portrait admitted. "Four men and four women, covering law enforcement, games, music, law, healing and a writer or reporter. You were the hero or

new celebrity and were the youngest, while your host was probably the oldest. The more I thought of it, the more certain I am that Preston was invited because you were; although what he hoped to discern, I am not certain."

"He also gave me a bit of a back-handed compliment," Harry divulged. "He said rarely did one not raised in the 'Old Families' conduct himself so well." He glanced at the portrait and added, "I have you to thank for that. You certainly put me through my paces before the Ball and this little 'tea party'."

"No protégé of mine will be permitted to embarrass me," responded Salazar complacently. "What else did he say?"

"That I intrigued him and that he hoped I would 'honor him with my presence' again soon."

"Interesting, very interesting," responded Salazar, rubbing his chin. "You will be hearing from him again, he's made that clear."

"But I don't know why," muttered Harry. "Why is he so interested in me? It's not as if it's common knowledge that I was summoned to 'defeat' him."

"Do you honestly believe that something like that can remain secret? With five teenagers, ten parents, two healers and a variety of other adults all aware of it?" Salazar arched an eyebrow at the teen's face as emotions raced across it.

"Oh bloody hell," he whispered. "If he knows, then he's watching me, evaluating me, and trying to figure out just what to do with me. It could be eliminate me, it could be ignore me, it could be try to persuade me to his side."

"I am surprised it took you so long to realize that," Salazar responded. "Have you ever known a secret known by so many to be kept confidential without a vow?" He let the young man pace for several minutes before saying, "You cannot act on this knowledge tonight. We will work through the options and potential responses together over the next few days. Finish your profiles before dinner."

Harry sat down heavily and stared at the journal before picking up the quill again. "I didn't glean much information on the reporter, just

a couple of comments." He turned the page and began an entry for Melinda Joyce.

Slytherin permitted a house elf to pour him an aperitif, a fino sherry with a dry and fruity flavor. He sat in one of his favorite chairs and lightly rolled the stem of the glass between his fingers as he assessed the afternoon's gathering.

He strongly suspected that that Bagman might have crossed the line between gambling and attempting to influence matches. He had given a veiled hint to Amelia Bones over tea, only mentioning how closely 'dear Ludo' seemed to watch certain matches. The raised eyebrow she returned let him know that she would evaluate the situation herself.

'Randolph MacFarlane's granddaughter had turned out quite well', he mused. He spread his legal work across three firms, not trusting any single firm to handle all of his holdings and Randolph's was one. Perhaps he would have her assist with some of his upcoming contracts to ascertain whether she had inherited her grandfather's discernment.

The reporter had been a bit disappointing he had to admit, unless she was much better at masking her appraisal of her surroundings and other guests than he thought. She hadn't seemed to take advantage of the opportunity afforded to her by asking astute yet mildly phrased questions of the other guests.

'And young Mr. Black,' he thought. 'Now there's a young man that interests me. Summoned by a ritual designed to bring someone to defeat me, he arrived with no holdings, yet within weeks he had opened a vault and purchased necessities. Injured when he appeared, he was being seen by Healer MacMillian, a known Mind Healer for 'the many traumatic events he endured'. He denies being part of the Ancient and Noble House of Black, yet conducts himself like a pureblood trained in the manner of one of the Old Families.' He took a sip of his sherry as he considered.

'He doesn't seem inclined to challenge me, but that could be temporary. He certainly threw himself into battle with the Blood Purists in Diagon Alley quickly enough.' He sipped his drink again and decided, 'I will have to devote more time to this young man. He might prove to be a beneficial ally if properly approached.'

That decided, he summoned a book from the shelf and began to read as the light faded and the shadows lengthened.

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Chapter 12 – Questions Questions Everywhere

"I'm sorry Minister, but I have been unable to find any information on Harrison Black before this year. There are no records of his birth or of his having taken the Ordinary Wizarding Level exams, whether in Britain or in any other ICW countries."

Minister of Magic Lucius Malfoy held the clerk from the Wizarding Examinations Authority under a cool glare. "I must have misunderstood you. I am quite certain that you are not telling me that an unidentified wizard with an unknown record was hired as an adjunct staff member at Hogwarts, has constant access to the children of prominent Families and no one knows who he is or whether he's qualified in any manner to teach those students. Surely that's not what you're telling me?"

Roger Hampton, a minor clerk in the Educational Division tried not to squirm under the Minister's gaze and questioning. His boss was out of the office and he was the one who had to respond to a summons to the Minister's office for confirmation that Harrison Black had documented O.W.L.s. "It's possible that his records were lost or misfiled," he offered. "Or that he was home-schooled and took his O.W.L.s in a non-ICW country." He twitched slightly as he added, "It's also possible that he's a member of a wealthy family that somehow managed to obscure his existence." He didn't mention that pureblood families frequently bribed officials to either create or hide the records of illegitimate offspring.

"I suggest you find out exactly who he is and where his qualifications are," the Minister replied silkily. "I expect a report back within a week, including a copy of his O.W.L. results to demonstrate he has the skills necessary to be a Hogwarts staff member, even if he is only an assistant. The Headmaster was given an exemption for Rubeus Hagrid, but no application for exemption of the O.W.L requirement was filed for any other staff member."

"Yes, Minister. I'll do what I can to find out."

Grey eyes became icy. "That is not what I requested, Hampton. I expect to have a full report within the week." His voice became very quiet. "Do I need to repeat my instructions?"

"No sir. Of course not, sir. I'll have that information by this time next week, sir," the clerk babbled.

The blonde's lips twitched into a calm and satisfied smile. "Good. Dismissed." He turned back to the papers on his desk and ignored the nervous clerk who bowed and stumbled out of the office.

The Right Honorable Lord Slytherin,

Thank you for opening your home and hosting the tea this afternoon. The repast was delicious and the company lively and entertaining. I enjoyed meeting your guests and learning more about Miss Joyce's favorite composers as well as Miss MacFarland's zeal with research and debating.

Thank you for making the afternoon enjoyable for each of us.

Sincerely,

Harrison Black

Harry read the brief note to Salazar, who nodded his acceptance. "That satisfies your obligations to courtesy, Harry. A hand-written thank you note should always be sent the day after someone hosts an event in their home."

The teen chuckled and replied, "You keep trying to teach me to be a gentleman, but I'm not sure it's really sinking in."

"The foibles of youth today," the portrait lamented with an amused sneer. "So little appreciation for etiquette and civility. However, as long as you continue to follow the instructions I provide, you will at least be perceived as a gentleman, no matter how erroneous that perception might be. You fulfilled your obligations by thanking the Malfoys after the ball, and now with your note to Slytherin." He paused before saying the name, not certain whether he wanted to claim this man as a descendent.

Harry stuck his tongue out at the portrait which rolled its eyes before the teen folded and sealed the thank you note. He set it aside to give to Hedwig to take later, but stood staring at neatly written "Lord Slytherin" address.

"Salazar," began the dark-haired youth slowly, "I have to admit that I came away from tea more confused than before I went. Riddle is remarkably different than his counterpart in my world. That lunatic certainly didn't host teas, nor did he have the social graces with polite conversation. He bullied and threatened and frightened people into obeying him. He seemed to need absolute domination of everyone. This Riddle seems to be more of an aristocratic politician."

The Founder's portrait raised an eyebrow at the youth. "Why does that confuse you, my young protégé?"

"If he's just a wealthy aristocrat, if he's just a politician, then why the bloody hell was I summoned here?" His voice rose in agitation as he finished the sentence. "He's not an inhuman mass murderer like my world's Riddle was. He's not insane, or if he is, he's hiding it pretty well. And there aren't the on-going attacks that I expected. The one on the shop in Diagon Alley that I interrupted is the only one that's happened since I've been here; or at least the only one publicized." He raised frustrated eyes to the portrait and repeated, "Why the hell am I here?"

"Perhaps you should be holding this conversation with the young people that summoned you," suggested the portrait. "My speculations would only be conjecture. You must ask the students what prompted their belief that a champion was needed."

Harry nodded, "Good point. As Flitwick said I've already mastered the charms he's teaching today, I think I will go back to the Library and go through more of the old newspapers papers to try to figure out what prompted their sense of urgency to attempt an unsupervised and potentially dangerous ritual."

In the Library, Harry surrounded himself with yellowed papers under the vigilant and critical eye of Madame Pince. "Both women are the same in either world," he muttered to himself with some amusement.

As Harry reviewed the Daily Oracle back copies, he made notes on the parchment next to him. He identified every death and injury, the cause, the date and whether it mentioned the blood status of the victims. As he finished each year, he totaled the deaths, separating the number due to accidents, illness and violence.

By the end of the morning, he had only completed five years of research, but was finding some interesting results. Many of the muggleborn deaths were due to illness, which made him wonder whether there were magical vaccines they were not receiving. The second largest number of muggleborn deaths was due to accidents, such as potion mishap, falling items, getting too close to dangerous creatures, and the like. The fewest deaths were from criminal violence.

Half-bloods and purebloods had few deaths due to illness, with the larger number of deaths due to magical accidents, including damage from miscast spells. He thought that many might be curses or hexes gone wrong, but saw little in the way of follow-up trials to support that theory. In fact, criminal violence was almost non-existent among the purebloods, leading him to believe that any retribution was handled quietly between families.

With all five years that he researched, the number of muggleborn deaths had crept up slowly, but there was no report of entire families being killed, as he had seen under Voldemort's reign. "It just doesn't make sense," he mumbled. "There's not an active war being fought, so why am I here?"

He wrote out a series of notes and then returned the papers before nodding politely to Madame Pince and leaving the library. Back in his quarters he called out, "Nebby!" With a small pop, the small figure appeared.

The eager house elf smiled broadly at the young man. "Yes Master Harry, sir? How may Nebby be helping?"

"Nebby, I don't want to impose, but I wondered whether you could help me deliver some notes to some students? I didn't want to make it too obvious by sending Hedwig."

The snowy owl resting on her perch in the sitting room ruffled her feathers and glared at him when he asked the house elf to deliver notes, and then promptly turned her back on her owner.

Harry hastened over to stroke the offended owl. "I know you're perfectly capable of delivering them, Hedwig, but when as beautiful an owl as you appears, she's bound to be noticed. I just wanted

them delivered without anyone else noticing." Although she huffed at him, she did turn around after several minutes of caresses.

Harry sighed at the temperamental bird and returned his attention to Nebby, who seemed to be watching the two with amusement. "Miss Hedwig is such a smart and pretty owl," she said. "Nebby knows that she could never replace Miss Hedwig, but hopes Miss Hedwig is willing to let Nebby help at times?" The owl huffed, but seemed mollified.

Harry gave an appreciative smile to the house elf and retrieved the notes from his book bag. "Would you please discretely leave these where the students will find them, Nebby?"

"Of course Master Harry, sir. Nebby is doing that immediately!" With another small pop, the house elf disappeared to complete her task.

A snort came from above the fireplace. "I believe I will have to readjust my understanding of who is the owner and who is the familiar," Salazar said with a smirk.

Harry grinned at the portrait. "I'm very well aware that Hedwig graciously condescended to accompany me and that I belong to her," he retorted. The snowy owl barked her approval at the answer, causing Salazar to chuckle warmly.

Harry waited at the designated table in a far corner of the Library for the counterparts to his friends from his world and his pseudo-siblings. He had tried to avoid them outside of classes, as it was emotionally draining to be around people wearing the faces of his best friends and yet having no relationship with them. Yet he had asked Nebby to deliver a note to each of them asking them to join him immediately after dinner in the Library to discuss the circumstances that led him to being summoned. He hoped they would have answers to his many questions.

He looked up from the book he was browsing as steps neared his secluded table, and all five teens turned the corner whispering about the invitation, which stopped abruptly when they saw him. Neville appeared both nervous and uncomfortable, while Hermione wore an expression of curiosity. Ron Weasley looked tense, likely because of the memories Harry had forced on him and the debt his family felt they now owed him for coming to help protect the Burrow. Holly and

Sebastian simply gave the impression of being intrigued, as Harry had been avoiding them before now.

The dark-haired youth nodded politely at them and indicated the chairs around the table with an elegant wave of his hand. "Thank you for joining me this evening. Won't you please take a seat?"

Once the teens were settled around the table, they looked at him with curious eyes. "Why did you invite us here, Mr. Black," asked Hermione. He smiled at the realization that she hated mysteries as much as her counterpart. His own Hermione frequently acted as if she needed to know information; that the lack of knowledge was a personal failing.

Neville apparently thought Hermione's question too abrupt and immediately added, "We're pleased to be able to offer you any assistance you may require, sir."

Harry nodded benignly at the younger teen. "Your courtesy is appreciated, Mr. Longbottom." Hermione flushed as she realized she had been less than polite in her approach, especially considering he was also an adjutant staff member.

Harry leaned forward in his chair and met each of the teen's eyes briefly, keeping his face cordial. "When you summoned me to this world, it was because you were looking for a champion to defeat Slytherin. I thought I was coming into a full-out war, with on-going attacks, but I've only seen the one vandalism attack in Diagon Alley, while everything else seems to be all political." He looked around at each teen again. "I need you to explain to me why you felt so much desperation that you decided to summon a 'champion'. It seems to me that you need to develop appropriate political strategies more than anything."

He should have guessed that Ron would respond first, "No, it's more than just politics you daft git!"

Hermione gasped and hit the teen in the arm. "Ron, where are your manners! And keep it down before Madame Pince throws us out."

The redhead didn't back down. "He doesn't understand. He hasn't lived through what we lived through! He's just..." The teen paused as he remembered the memories of the torture Harry endured and

his ears turned a red to match his hair, while he closed his eyes in embarrassment. "Um, I mean...well OK, it wasn't the same as your world or what you went through, but you have to understand what it's been like!"

Harry raised an eyebrow at the irritated and embarrassed teen, "I believe that's why I asked you all here tonight, Mr. Weasley." He withdrew his wand and the teens straightened, watching him cautiously. He hid a smirk and cast several conversation wards around them so that no one else could hear their conversation. He returned his wand to its holster and said, "Please continue, our privacy is assured." He had to hide another smirk when everyone unconsciously turned to Hermione.

The brunette sighed and took on the lecturing tone that he remembered so well from his own Hermione. "The Blood Purist movement has been around for several generations. It rises and falls in power, but has been on a steady increase for the last twenty years. You are correct that it has been primarily a political movement, Mr. Black, where laws were proposed and frequently passed that gave more power to purebloods and less to muggleborns and non-humans." She frowned as she tried to focus her argument. "When I cross-referenced the cases of violence and deaths during those twenty years, there was a noticeable upturn in violence towards muggleborns as well as violent deaths in the last five years."

"And why do you believe Lord Slytherin is behind the escalation in violence," asked Harry impassively.

To his surprise, Hermione turned to Neville. "Would you explain, please Neville?"

The slightly pudgy teen flushed at becoming the focus of attention. "My parents were involved in the investigation of increasing violence towards muggleborns when I was just a toddler. They were looking for common factors to determine whether it was a controlled and coordinated effort or simply coincidence. Shortly after their inquiries began, our house was attacked, and it was presumed it was by whoever was targeting muggleborns in retaliation for my parent's investigation. I survived the house collapsing, and Rita Skeeter..." The boy paused as his face twisted in disgust. He shook his head and continued, "Rita Skeeter decided that I must be a Boy-With-A-

Destiny. She even had the nerve to say that I had been saved by Magic itself to be a savior and guardian of the people. Any time there is any type of violence, she follows up with another article asking when I'm going to take up my assigned mantle as guardian of the people and protect them." The boy shook his head in frustration.

"But what gave us the sense of urgency, as you called it was because this past summer, right after one of Skeeter's stupid articles, I was out in the family greenhouse where I was developing a variation of the Devil's Snare. While I was there, I was surprised by a cloaked and hooded figure. He didn't attack me, but he did say that 'Lord S...our leader would be interested in someone of my pureblood background and obvious intelligence.' I said that I believed that one's ability to perform magic was more important than one's blood, and he left after a few minutes. He said it would be a shame if I or my family was targeted due to my beliefs." He looked at Harry with somber eyes. "That visit demonstrated that Skeeter's articles were being taken seriously by someone, and that my family was at risk. That firmed my resolve; no one threatens my family.

"If I was going to be a focus of their attention, then I needed to be stronger. Hermione thought of the idea of a familiar, and researching that found the spell to summon a champion. The increase in violence towards muggleborns and the threat to my family caused us to attempt the ritual."

Harry sat back in his chair and tried not to bang his head against the table. They pulled him out of his world because of a few threats? "Lord Slytherin's full name was never used? Just a veiled reference to him? Did it occur to you that perhaps he was being deliberately set up as the leader as a feint to draw attention away from another person or group?"

Neville nodded reluctantly. "My parents actually let him know about my 'visitor', but he denied any knowledge of it or association with the vandals posing as Blood Purists. He said there's no reason for violence towards muggleborns when logic and reason will prevail in securing our culture in the end."

"It's possible that he's not responsible," said Hermione with skepticism evident in her tone, "but he's been the primary leader trying to set up legislation that favors purebloods. That could be his public approach, while another group he set up focuses on

intimidation and violence." She frowned again as she tried to remember her statistics. "I'm also concerned about the increase in non-pureblood deaths from non-violent means. There might be some type of plot in place to take out non-purebloods disguised as natural deaths. The increase in deaths by accident and illness has been steadily increasing in the last few years."

Harry nodded his understanding as he had noticed the same trend in his own research. "Has anyone published that information and taken steps to make sure the muggleborns and half-bloods are being vaccinated against common magical illnesses or that encourages them to seek appropriate medical help if injured?"

"That's what Mum said should be done," smiled Holly. "She said we had to have the Ministry and possibly Hogwarts send out pamphlets about magical illnesses and injuries, what to do about them, and the consequences of delaying medical treatment."

After several minutes of additional conversation, Harry thanked the teens for coming to see him and explain their concerns. "My assumption that our worlds were alike in that an all-out war was in place was obviously wrong. The urgency and desperation that we felt in my world is different than what you have here. I do understand your concerns, Neville. Being the focus of Rita Skeeter's articles and unreasonable expectations is tough. The readers begin to believe what she says instead of thinking for themselves, and in your case, they choose to wait for their 'savior' to take action instead of doing anything themselves."

"Are you really angry that we performed the ritual," asked Neville somberly.

Harry blew air slowly out his pursed lips as he considered. "I have to admit that it's hard for me to understand your desperation when your world is so different. You don't have scores of people being brutally murdered every year; you have vandals. You don't have entire families being tortured and killed; you have questionable illnesses and accidents." The teens looked at each other uncomfortably at his words. "If I didn't have my own experiences to use as a comparison, I might be able to understand your fears, but it's difficult."

"We're very sorry we dragged you into this, Mr. Black," said Sebastian softly. "Ron told us about the memory you shared with

him. You're right that the violence that worries us is nothing compared to what you experienced. If we had known, we would never have tried to summon someone to help us."

Harry tried to give a smile to the teens. "Well, I did get to see people who died in my world alive and healthy in yours. That is one positive outcome of the situation."

Ron blushed to the tips of his ears and looked down at the table as he said, "The twins said that you...and I...were...best mates in your world?"

Harry's smile had a tinge of sadness as he replied, "Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger were my best friends since First Year. Neville Longbottom, Luna Lovegood and Ginny Weasley became close friends in later years. The Weasleys became a second family to me, and your Mum always gave me one of her hand-knit sweaters at Christmas."

"It must be hard seeing your friends and knowing they're not really the same people," said Holly gently.

Harry shrugged, "My life has never been normal, so why start now?" He stood and inclined his head to the teens. "Thank you for meeting me and helping me to understand your motives for bringing me here. I do appreciate it." He offered them a small polite smile and left the Library.

"That poor man," murmured Holly. "He's been through so much and seems so alone."

"I wish we had never summoned him," whispered Neville. "It was so unfair to him. I should have faced my responsibilities rather than try to palm them off."

"If we hadn't performed the ritual, he would have died," retorted Hermione. "It may not have been the best thing to do, but I'm glad that he's alive."

Ron nodded, "My Mum wants to invite him to Sunday dinner with the family. She says if the Molly Weasley in that world took him in, then we should do the same."

"Uncle Sirius and Uncle Peter say he has a really off-beat sense of humor. They like him a lot." Sebastian smiled and added, "I wish I could see that side of him."

"As long as we're here, why don't we start on our Charms homework," said Hermione. She ignored the groans from the others and opened her book bag to withdraw parchment for her essay.

"How do you feel about their revelations, Harry," asked Preston the following morning after Harry related his conversation with the teens.

"I wanted to scream at them," admitted the young man as he raked his hands through his hair. "They had the balls to pull a total stranger from his life just because they were uncomfortable. We had all out war; attacks on Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade, whole families being tortured and brutally murdered, parents forced to kill their own children under the Imperius..." He paused and shuddered as the memories swamped him.

"They just had political intrigue, petty vandalism and minor violence. The Aurors could handle the later while Dumbledore should have been able to create a voting alliance in the Wizengamot. There was no reason to summon anyone – much less me!"

"Would you rather have died in your cell," posed the Mind Healer gently.

"Yes...maybe...I don't know..." The teen tugged at his hair in frustration. "I would rather be alive in my world, I think. Even though so many died, it was my world. I shared experiences with those people. Even with everyone that died – and that was awful – it was still my world. I mourned the dead, especially the innocents, but I don't know these people. I wasn't raised here. It's like they're all imposters wearing the skins of my friends...and it hurts." His voice broke at the end. "It hurts so much sometimes, Preston."

Hedwig launched from her stand and landed in the young man's lap, nudging his hand with her head. He automatically began stroking the affectionate owl, and felt himself calm under the rhythmic and familiar sensation.

"Harry, it's all right to be angry, just as it's all right to grieve. There is no time limit on how long you should have those feelings, there's no

set formula that says as of five o'clock on Friday, you'll be fine. Life doesn't work that way. You need to recognize and accept that the healing process takes time."

"I should be stronger than this," muttered Harry. "If I could handle Voldemort, I should be able to handle this."

"Don't downplay your emotions, Harry. If you are distressed, it doesn't have to be worthy of the feelings by anyone else's terms. Denying your anger or your grief can end up extending how long you have those emotions."

Harry continued stroking Hedwig and then sighed heavily. "That's all I need, for these feelings to go on and on."

"Look at everything you've gone through, Harry. Personally, I think you should pat yourself on the back just because you're still standing. You've done everything you can to adjust and adapt. I hate to use an old cliché, but you're slowly taking this whole ordeal and letting it mold you into a stronger man."

"I don't feel stronger," Harry growled.

"Did you ever think you would be able to face Albus Dumbledore again? And yet you have. Did you think you would be able to face the basilisk in the Chamber again? Yet you did, and made a new friend. Did you ever imagine you would have tea with Tom Riddle? But you managed it."

Harry couldn't help but smile. "Tea with Riddle was surreal."

"And yet you did it. So as overwhelming and frustrating as this entire ordeal has been, you're still adapting and growing stronger because of it."

"I don't feel any stronger, though," repeated the teen.

Preston smiled at the scared man. "So you'll fake it until you feel it."

Harry's sense of humor asserted itself and he laughed at the older man. "OK, deal." He looked at Salazar's portrait and then back at Preston and changed the subject. "I'm thinking of taking Snape and Dumbledore down to the Chamber. They both want to see it."

"You've already coped with seeing the basilisk again yourself." He paused and then asked, "Do you want to share the experience, or do you feel like the Chamber is 'yours' and feel territorial about it?"

"Heh, I was the only person to go down there in my world, until several years later when we needed a basilisk fang. But Snape is a totally different person here. I actually like him. He's still kind of snarky and sarcastic, but he seems to be a decent guy."

"And Albus Dumbledore?"

"Well, he's different than his counterpart too. This Dumbledore would never have allowed the Tri-Wizard tournament to be held; never mind forcing me to compete. He was honestly horrified that Sirius wasn't punished more severely for almost murdering Snape by exposing him to Moony, or that Sirius wasn't given a trial after my parents were killed." Harry grinned as he remembered something. "He even asked if my world's Dumbledore was suffering from Dementia or a mind curse."

"Do you think you're still carrying over feelings from your world's Dumbledore to him?"

Harry sighed loudly as he petted Hedwig some more. "I don't actually want to forgive Dumbledore, but this man isn't the one who caused so much pain to so many people. So yes, I'm learning to separate him from the other man." He grinned mischievously and added, "Although I wouldn't mind if Shasanae made him wet himself."

Both the Headmaster and Potions Master were excited about being permitted to visit the fabled Chamber of Secrets. While Dumbledore made no secret of his excitement with his broad smile, Snape attempted a more dignified appearance, but was unable to hide the anticipation in his eyes. Until they reached the girl's bathroom, that is.

"Mr. Black, kindly convince me that this location is not your childish attempt at a prank," he said with a slight glare at the younger man.

"Hey, I wasn't the one that selected this location one thousand years ago!" Harry protested. "Who knew that Salazar Slytherin had such a sense of humor," he added facetiously.

"Seriously though, it is through here." He cast a spell to ensure there were no girls inside, then opened the door and allowed the two older men to precede him into the room. Once inside, Snape cast an immediate repellent charm on the door, while Dumbledore simultaneously warded the room from being entered from the hall.

Harry waited until they were finished, and tried to hide his amusement that the two men were embarrassed at being caught in a girl's bathroom. He moved to the bank of sinks and waited for them to join him. "Open" he hissed at the small snake engraved on one of the taps. With a grinding sound, the sink began to recess into the floor. As the noise stopped, a large passage leading underground was revealed.

"The first time I was here, I just jumped down and slid down the pipes," he began.

Immediately, Dumbledore leaned over the hole and jumped. A loud "Wheeee!" was heard, gradually becoming more faint as he slid further away. Several long seconds later they heard him shout up, "I haven't had this much fun in years. Do come and join me boys!"

Severus closed his eyes and shook his head slowly at the old man's antics. He looked at Harry and asked, "You began to say that your first time you jumped down, Mr. Black. What about subsequent times?"

Harry chuckled and said "Stairs" in Parseltongue, followed by "Lights". The stairs appeared, lit by torches and Severus proceeded sedately down them, followed by a grinning Harry.

At the bottom of the stairs, Albus looked at them with disappointment in his eyes. "You passed up the opportunity for the best slide I've enjoyed in years, Severus. I think you should try it. You could use more fun in your life."

"We have different ideas of what constitutes entertainment, Headmaster," said Severus severely. He looked around at the

corridor and then back at Harry with evident disappointment. "Is this the Chamber, Mr. Black?"

"No sir," Harry assured him with a smile. "This is only the corridor that leads to the Chamber."

They walked down the twisting underground passage, small skeletons occasionally crunching under their feet. Eventually, they reached the massive doorway guarding the actual entrance. "Open" Harry commanded the entwined serpents on the door. With a loud rumble, the gears moved and tumbled until the doors swung open.

Harry bowed to the other two men and gestured towards the doorway. "Gentlemen, welcome to the legendary Chamber of Secrets" he announced grandly.

The two older men stopped several feet inside the door to look around with avid interest at the well lit towering pillars engraved with serpents that supported the ceiling. They walked slowly down the path, examining each pillar as they moved. At the end of the last pair of pillars, Harry smiled and pointed to the enormous statue as he said "Allow me to present Salazar Slytherin, one of the original Founders of Hogwarts"

"Amazing," whispered Dumbledore as he stared keenly at the mammoth statue.

Harry grinned at the Headmaster. "According to Shasanae, it was his grandson that had the statue built. She said Salazar would never have permitted such an ostentatious display. She called his grandson Servius, 'a pompous hatchling'".

Albus smiled at the information while Severus merely arched an eyebrow, clearly wanting to explore the Chamber and holding himself still only through great personal fortitude.

"Shasanae resides in a chamber inside the statue," Harry informed them. "Stand back and keep your eyes away from the entrance until I let her know you're here." He turned back to the statue and said, "Speak to me Slytherin", having learned from Salazar that the phrase "greatest of the Hogwarts Four" wasn't part of the actual password.

Once again, the gigantic stone face began to move. The statue's mouth opened wide as the jaw dropped to reveal the entrance to another compartment in the Chamber. He heard scales upon stones as the great basilisk slithered towards the open mouth. "Shasanae," he called, "I've brought you the Headmasster and the Potions Masster as we discusssed."

"They are welcome man-child," the great snake hissed as she slithered out of the stone mouth. "I have closed my inner lid, so they are in no danger." Harry suddenly gasped noticeably at the image of the snake emerging from the mouth, causing all three to stop and look at him.

"What is it Harry," asked the Headmaster with gentle concern.

"The Dark Mark," Harry said hoarsely, "Voldemort's Mark...it was a snake crawling out of the mouth of a skull. I'll bet he designed it based on this Chamber, but it never occurred to me before. Seeing Shasanae come out made me realize it." He shook his head dazedly, trying to get the image of the Dark Mark out of his mind.

"Headmaster, Professor Snape, this is Shasanae. She was hatched and raised to protect the school and the students. Her inner eyelid is closed, so you may look at her without injury." He turned to the snake and hissed, "Shasanae, the older human iss the current Headmasster of the sschool, while the younger iss the Potions Masster."

The great snake slithered closer and then raised herself up inspecting both men. She moved a few feet closer, her tongue darting out to taste the air around the two men. She lowered her head so closely they could feel the air move with her tongue, but both stood their ground as she inspected them. "I approve," she said simply before swinging her body in a way that allowed her to rest her head gently on the Potions Master's shoulder. The dark-haired man's eyes widened in surprise, but he then hesitantly brought his hand up and stroked her head. She hissed in pleasure and bumped him when he stopped, not sure whether the hiss was anger or not.

"I think she likes you, Professor," Harry said with a grin.

The Potions Master huffed, but continued to stroke the giant snake as he inspected her closely. "What a pity that Parseltongue can't be learned," he murmured.

Harry blinked at the older man. "Can't it? I never tried to teach someone how to speak it. I would be willing to try to instruct you. Can you say "hello"?

Shasanae blinked at the young wizard. "Hello," she replied with a question in her tone.

Harry laughed and hastened to explain that he was going to see if he could teach either man to speak Parseltongue. "It iss difficult, but not imposssible from what Ssalazar told me," she hissed.

"Shasanae says it's difficult to learn Parseltongue, but possible" he related to them with a broad smile.

"I would be interested in making the attempt," Albus said with a smile at the great snake.

"As would I," Severus agreed.

Shasanae followed them around the Chamber as they investigated it, and hissed in laughter as they tried to learn how to say "hello" to her. Eventually, both of them were able to make a credible greeting to their immense pleasure.

Harry counted himself lucky as he escaped from Madame Pomfrey's clutches. This had been his final physical exam since his abrupt arrival in this world.

"Your bones have been regrown and are strong," Poppy said with evident satisfaction as she waved her wand over him with a diagnostic spell. "The rupture in your spleen and the bruising on your kidneys are finally fully healed, and you have fully recovered from the rest of your internal injuries. Your lung capacity seems fine as well." She focused on his eyes with another diagnostic spell. "I have to admit that I was originally worried whether you would regain the eyesight in your right eye; how the werewolf that clawed your face didn't remove the eye is beyond me." She looked at him with some regret. "Unfortunately, I am unable to heal the claw marks any further."

Harry smiled at the older woman and shrugged. "The ladies like a few scars."

She chuckled and swatted him on the shoulder. "You gave up the cane two weeks ago. Have you had any problems with your legs or your back?"

"No ma'am," he assured her.

She raised an eyebrow at him. "Would you tell me if you were?"

He grinned unrepentantly and said, "It would depend on whether I could walk and sleep, but I honestly haven't had more than a couple of twinges when I overdo things. It's no worse than when anyone overdoes it."

"Hmph, be sure you come see me if it ever lasts for more than one day." She put her wand away and asked, "Are you still speaking with Healer MacMillian?"

Harry jumped down off the bed and grinned at her. "We speak twice a week now. He assures me that I'm getting stronger all the time, but that I can fake it until I feel it."

She couldn't hold back a chuckle. "That sounds like him," she admitted. "All right, you're free to go, Mr. Black. I hope the next time I see you here it's only because you're visiting."

"Thank you, Poppy," he replied with a broad smile. To her surprise, he leaned over and gave her a quick kiss on the cheek. "I'll just escape before you change your mind," and quickly headed out the door, dodging the stinging hex she sent his way.

He headed up to the Great Hall for breakfast, having had his appointment early to avoid any students. He sat besides Madame Hooch, who gave him the obligatory tweaking about the girls in the school gazing at him with a combination of lust and admiration. He was grateful when she finished her meal before him and headed out of the Hall.

Severus Snape on his other side leaned over to say quietly, "I would like to express my appreciation again for including me in the visit to

Slytherin's Chamber. Was the basilisk in your world as large as this one?"

Harry nodded as he spread jam on his toast. "She seemed much larger to me, as I was only twelve and a bit small for my age. She could have swallowed me whole with a single gulp...and was doing her best to accomplish that exact result."

Severus shuddered briefly. "Twelve years old, and you killed the one in your world?"

"Fawkes brought me the Sorting Hat and it contained Gryffindor's sword. I was able to thrust it up through the roof of her mouth when she attempted to swallow me."

"You must have given your professors heart failure with your recklessness," he replied with a small glare, although his heart wasn't quite in it.

"Hey, I tried to get the DADA professor to help. Unfortunately, he was such a phony, he just tried to obliviate us and run away. But at least I looked for an adult before going down there."

Severus shook his head in bemusement. "The DADA professor should have known about roosters, but as you said, he was incompetent. At least Shasanae isn't a threat to the students in this world." He sipped his tea and added, "I am looking forward to learning Parseltongue. Perhaps we could develop a schedule for language lessons?"

Harry smiled at the eager Potions Master. "We would have to work around your detentions, but I would be happy to set aside time twice a week with you and the Headmaster. Whatever works for you two as the Quidditch training is all before dinner on week nights, and Rolanda and I switch off the weekend sessions."

"Excellent. I will coordinate times with Albus and then give you options when we are likely free."

"And I'll try to set up an actual lesson plan, so that you can learn the most useful words and phrases first."

The sound of wings announced the morning mail, and Harry looked up to see if Hedwig was going to come steal bacon from him this morning. To his surprise, two unfamiliar owls landed before him and extended their legs. One bore the Ministry seal, so he took that first. The second bore the same seal that had accompanied his invitation to tea and he was hesitant to accept it. When Severus raised an eyebrow at his reluctance, he grudgingly removed the letter from the owl and put it in a pocket. He broke the Ministry seal and read through the missive. "Oh bloody hell," he muttered as he finished the letter.

"Problem?" asked Severus with a barely visible smile at the other's tone of disgust.

"I better talk to Albus about this. The Education Division learned that I'm an adjunct staff member and is requesting a copy of my O.W.L.'s or at least notice of where they were taken so that they can obtain a copy." He looked back down at the letter. "Apparently it's a requirement that any teaching staff member have an Outstanding NEWT in the subject they are teaching and adjunct staff must have appropriate OWL scores."

"I am certain that the Headmaster will be able to resolve the situation," Severus replied.

Harry nodded and stood to go to the Headmaster's office, when additional fluttering caught his attention. An ancient owl landed heavily on the table and stumbled before righting itself. Harry sat back down as he recognized Errol, the Weasley owl, and hid a chuckle at the elderly owl's antics. He offered the bird a sip of water and then a bit of his scone. Eventually, the elderly owl recovered enough to offer his leg to Harry. He unrolled the letter and smiled at the invitation from Molly Weasley to dinner this coming Sunday. Apparently, the compassionate woman was going to insist that he not be a stranger to them simply because her counterpart accepted Harry.

"Why don't you rest up in the Owlery," he suggested to Errol. "I can send a response with Hedwig, who has been looking for exercise. After a good night's rest, you can head back to the Weasley's." The owl hooted gratefully stepped up onto Harry's arm and accepted his launching the bird back into the air. Errol wobbled a bit but then turned towards the school Owlery.

Over at the Gryffindor table, the twins noticed the old bird bring an invitation to the assistant Flight Instructor. "Bet Mum invited him to dinner," said George.

"And is probably already looking for his birthday so she knows when to send him a tin of home-made fudge," added Fred with a grin. They continued to whisper as Harry left the Hall through the staff entrance.

Harry strode quickly through the halls, avoiding eye contact with the giggling girls who tried to catch his attention. He reached the gargoyle and gave the week's password, "Raspberry Tortes". The gargoyle jumped aside revealing the stairs, and Harry let them carry him up to the Headmaster's office. As he raised his hand to knock, he heard, "Come in, Mr. Black."

He opened the door and accepted the seat in front of the desk to which the Headmaster waved him. Fawkes trilled a welcome from his perch, and Harry smiled at the handsome phoenix. Before the elderly wizard could ask him the reason for his visit, he handed over the letter from the Education Division.

Albus read through it and nodded, "I see." He looked at Harry over his glasses. "How would you like to handle this, Mr. Black? I assume you don't wish it to become common knowledge that you are from an alternate dimension?"

Harry grimaced at the possible consequences if that became public knowledge. "I would like that to remain as quiet as possible," he confirmed.

"In that case, we have a couple of options. I believe you told the students on the Quidditch teams that you had been home-schooled?"

Harry nodded. "I gave that story to Lucius Malfoy as well and said that I participated in publicly organized Quidditch for students."

"In that case, unless you object, I believe it would be possible to add your OWL results outside of the British Ministry. Perhaps Canada?"

"I have no objection, sir, unless you are going to get in trouble."

The blue eyes seem to laugh at him, but he responded kindly, "I appreciate your concern but I am quite good friends with the Canadian Director of Education. Do you recall what your results were?" He picked up a quill and pulled a piece of parchment over, and looked at Harry inquisitively.

"Yes sir. I had an O in DADA and they gave me a bonus because I could create a corporeal patronus. I had E's in Care of Magical Creatures, Charms, Potions, and Transfiguration. I had an A in Astronomy, and since I had no seer talent, a P in Divination. I was ill during the History of Magic test and was given a D due to having to leave the exam."

The Headmaster finished writing the scores and nodded. "I will forward the scores to my friend in Canada, and then give you all the information you need to satisfy the British Wizarding Examinations Authority."

Harry smiled and stood, "Thank you Headmaster. I appreciate the help."

"No thanks necessary, my dear boy. We were the ones that put you in this position, so it is only right that we help you as needed."

Once Harry left, the Headmaster wrote a quick note, spelled it to be readable by no one but the designated recipient, and asked Fawkes to deliver it. The phoenix jumped over to the desk and took the letter in his beak and then burst in to flames and disappeared. Albus nodded and went back to the stack of mail on his desk with a martyred sigh, but squared his shoulders in determination.

Back in his quarters, Harry wrote a quick note of acceptance to Molly Weasley. Although he knew they weren't his adopted family, he still looked forward to a dinner at the Burrow. He wondered whether anyone had discovered if Fleur was interning at Gringotts to improve her English.

"Hedwig, would you please deliver this note to Molly Weasley at the Burrow," he asked the snowy owl. She looked at him as if annoyed that he had to ask, and held out her leg. He quickly tied the letter with a silk cord and opened the window for her. "Thank you,

beautiful," he said. Mollified at the description, she nibbled his fingers before launching herself out of the window.

"It is quite obvious who holds the power in your relationship," smirked Salazar from above the fireplace.

"Hey, I already admitted that I'm perfectly aware that she owns me," Harry grinned. He sat down and then frowned as the other letter crinkled in his pocket. "Oh hell, I almost forgot," he muttered.

"Language, Harry," admonished the portrait.

"Well, it's justified," the teen responded as he stared at the seal. "I received another letter from Lord Slytherin."

Salazar's interest immediately perked up and he watched as Harry just stared at the letter, as if waiting for it to hex him. "It is not going to read itself," he smirked.

Harry growled at the portrait, but slid his finger under the wax seal and opened the letter.

Dear Mr. Black,

I was pleased to have your company this past week. I recall from your discussions that you are interested in pursuing a Mastery in Defense, although you are also expressed an interest in warding and curse-breaking. I must admit that those are all special interests of mine as well.

I have a book on Defense written by Godric Gryffindor, that discusses many spells no longer in practice today in which you might be interested. As the book is quite rare, I cannot loan it out, but I would be pleased to permit you to review it at your leisure within Slytherin Manor.

Please let me know a day and time when you would like to peruse it, and I will have it available.

Sincerely,

Lord Slytherin

Harry looked up at the portrait, "Did Godric Gryffindor actually write a Defense book?"

"Oh yes," Salazar replied. "It was the foundation for the Defense training we offered at Hogwarts. He never had it publicly published, so if it is Godric's book, it is one of a kind. I wonder what other relics he has of the four of us." The portrait looked at Harry with an air of appraisal.

Harry narrowed his eyes at the portrait. "You want me to go, don't you?"

"Not only that," responded the portrait with a smirk, "but I want you to bring me with you."

OoOoOoOo

Chapter 13 - Innuendoes, Insinuations and Intimations

Harry gently added the fifth ward on top of the other four under the watchful painted eyes of Salazar Slytherin. He breathed a sigh of relief as the ward structure accepted the newest spell. He looked up at the portrait and said, "OK, that's the harmful intent on the surrounding area, harmful spell protection on the surrounding area and the interior, notice of arrivals, wind damage, and finally fire damage wards."

"Proceed," instructed Salazar, watching the younger man carefully.

The dark haired young man looked at the paper house lying in front of the fireplace. He thought of crushing it under his foot, and stepped forward. Immediately, he felt a ringing that announced the wards were under attack and his foot bounced off an invisible shield around the paper house. He cast a bludgeoning charm, which was absorbed by the wards. A blast of wind rebounded off the invisible shields. An Incendio would have rebounded and caused his furniture to catch fire if he hadn't immediately cast an Aquamenti charm to drown the fire.

"Acceptable," approved the portrait. "Now begin to layer in the charm against Dark Creatures."

Harry lifted his wand and frowned as he began to layer the sixth ward. "I know you've explained it, but I still think the harmful intent should be enough," he muttered.

"There are layers, degrees and nuances among each ward, my young protégé. You must learn how each works with one another. Once you master each ward, we will begin with detailed integration rather than simple layering."

Harry listened with only partial attention as he tried to add the sixth ward. He struggled as he felt them shift and begin to falter, pouring more power into the spell. The result was a loud detonation as the wards collapsed and the paper house burst into flames. "Bugger," Harry muttered as he wiped soot from his face. "It's always the sixth layer."

"Wait until you're working on the thirtieth layer when they implode," smirked Salazar.

The teen glared tiredly at the portrait. "You enjoy being sadist, don't you?"

"I believe the same allegation was commonly held by my students a millennium ago. Said conviction did not prevent me from having them repeat the exercise then, nor will it foster negligence on my part now. Begin the sequence again. You do realize that the more effort you put into learning this, the more powerful the wards."

Harry groaned and transfigured another parchment into a paper house and began the warding chain again. After the first ward was cast, he looked back at the portrait. "What do you mean, 'the more effort I put in, the more powerful the wards will be'?"

Slytherin looked at Harry as if he had disappointed the Founder and pinched the bridge of his nose. "You know nothing of rituals?" he asked. Harry shook his head and looked at him expectantly. "Rituals draw power from surmounted challenges, completed tasks and hard-won accomplishments. Even normal non-ritual magic is more powerful if you go through some trouble to actually get it. For example, if you searched for a particular spellbook for weeks, looking through libraries, books stores and second-hand shops and then had to perform a variety of chores for the shopkeeper in order to obtain it, it is more likely that you will learn the spells in the book more quickly and achieve better results from them than if you had been handed the book the moment you wanted it. When magic is earned it's stronger and more focused."

Harry's brow furrowed as he tried to comprehend this new concept. "Salazar, Voldemort in my world used a ridiculously convoluted method that involved the Tri-Wizard Tournament to capture me and use me in a blood ritual to restore him to a body. It never made sense to me why he didn't have his Death Eater just slap a portkey on me sometime during the school year. However, if I understood what you said, if Voldemort had gotten his hands on me earlier, the chances of the rebirth ritual succeeding would have been lessened? But because I competed against other wizards and witches in the tournament and overcame the challenges, my blood then gave Voldemort additional power?"

Slytherin inclined his head in a brief nod of agreement, "Precisely."

"Voldemort always seemed to attack on either Halloween or the spring. Does that also mean that specific dates also hold greater power? "

The painting rolled his eyes. "Have you never learned of Samhain and Beltane? What is Hogwarts teaching students these days? I am going to have to have a serious discussion with Dumbledore someday very soon."

"I don't remember them ever being mentioned in any class," Harry admitted. "So Halloween or Samhain is a day of power, and Beltane is in the Spring and is another day of power? No wonder Voldemort attacked on those days every year."

"Samhain and Beltane are two extremely powerful days and will result in exceptionally potent magic," Slytherin granted. "Were I to perform an intricate ritual, I would attempt to use those or a similar day myself, depending on the purpose of the rite. Now, return to the wards and let us see if you can manage the sixth one this time."

Lord Slytherin read the letter than accompanied the file and turned to it with interest. After a very few minutes, he raised an elegant eyebrow at the papers before him and couldn't contain the minuscule smile of appreciation that he experienced. The "Hero of Diagon Alley's" files had been miraculously found in Canada misfiled under his given name rather than his surname. He inclined his head in a gesture of respect for the scheming and maneuvering that resulted in the copy of the file before him.

Harrison Black was apparently the adopted son of two Muggles who bore the surname Black. His wizarding heritage was unknown, as he had been left at a Muggle orphanage clandestinely. The file only contained the barest of information on the young man.

Name: Harrison James Black, birth name unknown

Birthdate: Assumed August 1, 1980

Parents: Adopted parents Ames and Leila Black (Welsh, emigrated to Canada)

School: Homeschooled

O.W.L. Results

Care of Magical Creatures: Theory O, Practical O, Overall Outstanding

Charms: Theory E, Practical E, Overall Exceeds Expectations

Defense: Theory O, Practical O, Overall Outstanding

Divination: Theory E, Practical P, Overall Average

Herbology: Theory E, Practical E, Overall Exceeds Expectations

History: Overall Acceptable

Potions: Theory E, Practical E, Overall Exceeds Expectations

Transfiguration: Theory E, Practical E, Overall Exceeds Expectations

N.E.W.T Results

No results recorded

"His O.W.L. results are good without being exceptional; just an ordinary teenager without any remarkable qualities or abilities, certainly nothing to make him stand out or gain anyone's attention. I wonder what Lucius will make of this," he said softly with amusement. He leaned back in his chair and steepled his fingers. "You become more interesting all the time, Mr. Black", he murmured musingly. "I look forward to our next encounter. With the bait I provided, I anticipate that meeting being sooner rather than later."

Harry sneezed from the soot attached to his clothes after Floo'ing into the ramshackle home. He muttered a quick spell to clean off the soot, and had to smile at the familiar room with its haphazard collection of worn furniture and a half-finished knitting project poking up from a bag near a chair by the window.

A smiling Molly Weasley bustled into the room from the direction of the kitchen, from where a delicious aroma drifted. "There you are! Welcome, Harry dear," she said warmly. Although she didn't give him one of the rib-crushing hugs his Molly always gave him, she laid

a hand on his arm and appeared genuinely delighted to welcome him back to the Burrow. "Arthur is outside showing one of his Muggle contraptions to Bill if you want to join the men, but you're welcome to join me in the kitchen as well. I'm just finishing up the potatoes."

Harry couldn't help but return the woman's smile, "I'll be happy to help you, Mrs. Weasley."

The red-headed woman looked at him in shock. "As if I would let a guest in my home help in the kitchen..." She paused as his face fell slightly, and then a neutral mask covered his features. She immediately knew she had said something wrong and hastily added, "But of course, you're not exactly a guest, are you? Perhaps you wouldn't mind setting the table for me?" She was rewarded with a shy yet pleased smile and turned back to the pot of potatoes she was preparing to mash with her own smile. 'He is such a good boy,' she thought as the young man headed towards the correct cupboard and began taking out plates.

"Is it just the four of us, Mrs. Weasley," Harry asked as he retrieved plates.

"Eight today, Harry dear," she responded. "Arthur and I, you and Bill and then my brothers Fabian and Gideon are joining us today, with their wives Judith and Joanne. I'm sure you know them from your own world." She smiled at him over her shoulder briefly, but returned to mashing the potatoes and missed his sudden stillness.

"Fabian and Gideon Prewett," Harry repeated but too quietly for Molly to hear. He set out the eight plates, and followed with silverware and glasses. He retrieved the bottle of wine he had hidden in his cloak and positioned it near Arthur Weasley's place as a host gift. Molly would likely have refused it if he had given it to her.

Arthur and Bill Weasley returned to the kitchen and greeted Harry with warm handshakes and smiles, before sniffing appreciatively at the delicious aromas in the room. "I hope the others join us soon," said Arthur after his wife slapped his hands away from the warm rolls.

The whoosh of the Floo in the next room answered his wish, and a cacophony of laughing voices immediately followed. Arthur hurried

to the living room to welcome his wife's brothers and their wives and lead them to the kitchen. "Thank goodness you're here," he said with a smirk in his wife's direction. "I thought Molly was going to starve the lot of us!"

"Honestly Arthur!" Molly protested as she shook a spoon at her husband. The two latest male arrivals descended on her and gave her a loud smacking kiss on each cheek.

"Shame on you, Molly," said one.

"Starving your husband," added the other.

"Tsk ts."k."

Harry couldn't help but chuckle at the Prewett brothers. They appeared to be older versions of Fred and George Weasley, with perhaps slightly more auburn hair and a few less freckles. Harry half expected that their wives would be twins, but Judith had dark brown hair and eyes while Joanne had strawberry blonde hair and bright blue eyes. The brothers wore cheery smiles and both kissed and teased their sister until she was blushing with both embarrassment and amusement.

"You two behave yourselves and meet our guest, Harry Black. Harry, these rascals are my brothers, Fabian and Gideon," she added pointing to each brother in turn. "Their lovely wives are Judith and Joanne."

Judith smiled at the young man and added, "The boys figured something was up when Molly invited you to Sunday dinner, and harassed her until they had your secret." At Harry's sudden stillness, she hastened to add, "But you needn't worry. Each of us swore an oath to keep the fact that you're from a parallel world a secret."

Harry blinked in surprise, not having expected that revelation. He swallowed hard and accepted the hand that Fabian held out to him. "Judith is quite right, Mr. Black. Besides, Molly would have our livers on a platter if we couldn't keep a secret."

Gideon held out his own hand and added, "We've learned the importance of confidentiality over the years. While one of the more

interesting secrets we hold, it's not the same as classified that Lucius Malfoy wears a thong."

Harry choked on the greeting he was trying to give, and Fabian hit him between the shoulder blades a few times. "Steady there, Mr. Black. It's not like we mentioned the color!"

"Call me Harry, please," the young man laughed. "After a conversation about thongs, I think we're familiar enough with one another!" Joanne choked on her laughter, her blue eyes bright with amusement.

Arthur was delighted with the wine he found on the table and happily filled everyone's glasses. Molly gave a suspicious glare towards Harry, but sipped her own glass with evident pleasure. The roast was tender and delicious, served with carrots and small onions, mashed potatoes, as well as buttery rolls.

As everyone became satiated with the excellent meal, Gideon couldn't help but ask, "What were our counterparts like in your world?"

"My world was different than yours," Harry began quietly. "It was much more violent; we were truly at war. During the Dark Lord's first rise to power, your counterparts joined the Order of the Phoenix to fight against Voldemort and his followers. You were quite effective, as eventually you became prime targets." Harry's voice trailed off as he played with a watch band around his wrist.

"We were killed in your world, weren't we," asked Gideon after a brief glance at his brother who was looking at the young man with curiosity. Each of the wives gripped their husband's hands silently.

Harry sighed heavily. "It was before I was born, I think. You were attacked by five Death Eaters. The word was that you fought like true heroes, but ultimately fell."

"We should count ourselves fortunate," Molly said softly as her hands clutched her own husband's hand and one of her brother's hands. "The violence never escalated here as it did in your world; it hasn't been all-out war. The Blood Purists are mostly hidden and although their actions are devious and malicious, there hasn't been fighting in the streets."

"At least not until the 'Hero of Diagon Alley' showed up," Fabian responded with a grin towards the young man. "You're wearing an interesting watch, Harry. It looks quite a bit like my own." He held up his hand to show an identical watch.

Harry responded with a weak smile back at the older man. "Molly gave me your watch on my seventeenth birthday," Harry said quietly, displaying the watch more overtly. "She said it was traditional to give a wizard a watch when he came of age." He looked at the gold watch, which had stars as clock hands. "I've treasured it since."

"More than anything, that tells us how much a part of the family you were back in your own world, Harry." He smiled at the younger man. "I hope you allow us to make you just as welcome in this world."

Harry choked on an unexpected lump in his throat. Joanne leaned in and murmured, "I can't even imagine what it must be like to see so many familiar people who are somehow strangers. But no matter what, you're not alone, even if it sometimes feels differently." She laid a soft hand over his. "You are welcome with the Prewetts and the Weasleys. You're just the type of young man we want to include in the family."

In an effort to lighten up the emotional atmosphere, Bill added, "Besides, I let Charlie know that a 'seer' had hinted at a French part-Veela as a match for me, and Charlie wants to know if you have any news on a fiancé for him as well."

Molly's eyes widened and she leaned forward to look at Harry with excited curiosity. "Well, I heard rumors that he dated a player on the Holyhead Harpies," the teen said with a smile. "But Charlie always kept personal information close to the vest."

Bill snorted with laughter as Molly sat back again with an expression of resigned chagrin. "I guess that means I had better work harder on meeting Miss Delacour, before Mum tracks the young lady down herself." Molly's face immediately brightened.

"Are you sure we need to do this?" Harry tried to keep the whine out of his voice, but the arched eyebrow of his companion demonstrated that he failed. "Oh come on, it's not like this is going to be fun," he huffed.

"You make the deficiencies in your education readily apparent. The subtle comments, queries and ripostes in social discourse can be most entertaining to a discerning mind."

"Well, how about if you go visit your descendent by yourself and I stay home then?"

Salazar glared at the younger man. "Your attempted diversions will accomplish nothing. Proceed."

Harry sighed and removed the painting from the wall and laid it on the desk. After a shrinking spell, he placed the painting on a chain and lifted it over his head, letting the portrait rest against his chest. A disillusionment spell followed by a notice-me-not spell on the painting allowed it to lie on his chest unnoticed. He stepped over to the Floo and checked the time with a quick Tempus. The Floo to Lord Slytherin's home would open for only two minutes and he didn't want to miss it - well, actually he did, but Salazar would make his life a living hell if he did.

Harry and his disillusioned Salazar necklace Floo'd into an elegantly appointed room and were met by a house elf clad in a tiny butler's uniform. The dignified little elf bowed and said, "Lord Slytherin asked Gaspar to show Master Black to the study. Please follow Gaspar, sir." He led the young man to a small study where an ancient bound manuscript was laid out on an sophisticated rosewood desk.

"Lord Slytherin requests that you please be wearing these gloves while examining the book, Master Black," the elf said presenting white silk gloves to his master's guest. He waited until Harry had put on the gloves and then bowed again and disappeared with a small pop.

Harry moved around the desk and examined the ancient bound manuscript. He carefully opened the leather cover and revealed the first page. "Protective Battle Magicks by Godric Gryffindor," he read out loud. He cast a modified privacy spell over his head and chest and then asked Salazar quietly, "Is that really the book that Godric wrote?"

"Yes, I recognize the hand-writing as his own," responded Salazar. "This is indeed either the original manuscript or an excellent copy."

As long as you have this opportunity, you should examine it. For all his faults, Godric was moderately creative at using transfiguration and charms in battle conditions."

Over the course of the next two hours, Harry learned that Salazar was a master of understatement. Godric Gryffindor was inspired at blending multiple disciplines in combat situations. In one section, he described how to develop chains of spells so that the last wand movement of one spell was also the beginning movement of the next spell, saving precious seconds in battle, especially against multiple opponents. Another section demonstrated how to take inert objects and animate them with charms to provide decoys or one-shot assailants.

A small pop interrupted Harry's eager perusal of the manuscript. Looking up, he saw the house elf that had led him to the study. "Gaspar apologizes for disturbing Master Black, but Lord Slytherin is preparing to take tea and crumpets and invites Master Black to join him."

"Game on," Harry thought with a slight grumble. He dispelled the privacy spell around the upper part of his body with a subtle movement behind the cover of the desk, and then nodded to the house elf and replied, "It would be my pleasure. Please lead the way."

Gaspar led him to a sophisticated sun room that looked out on the impeccably manicured lawns of the estate. His host was already seated beside a table with a tea service on it as well as a variety of pastries and fresh fruit. The dark-haired man inclined his head graciously to Harry as the younger man entered the sun room.

"Please," he said as he waved an elegant hand to the seat across from him, "have a seat, Mr. Black." Gaspar poured both men a cup of tea and offered them cream and sugar, which both declined. The house bowed and disappeared with a quiet pop.

Harry sipped his tea and tried not to stare at his host. With this third encounter, he could not deny that this was unquestionably not the Lord Voldemort of his world, but a still handsome wizard in his late middle years who was certainly at the height of his powers. Slytherin was again dressed in muted colors, wearing a robe that even Harry could tell was of the finest material. "Would the Tom Riddle of my

world have been like this if only he hadn't been returned to an abusive orphanage every summer," the young man wondered.

"How are you enjoying Gryffindor's manuscript," asked his host politely.

Harry blushed, realizing he hadn't thanked the man for the invitation or the chance to see such a rare work. "It is truly enthralling, Lord Slytherin. I can only blame my poor manners on how absorbing the work is. Thank you for this unique opportunity."

The older man inclined his head graciously. "You are welcome, Mr. Black. I assume that as a home-schooled man, you likely didn't have access to many ancient magical tomes as you grew up."

"No sir, I didn't," Harry admitted. He tried to remember what he had been told about the history Dumbledore created for him. "My adoptive parents lived in a primarily non-magical town, so there wasn't a magical library and only the family books available."

"A Muggle town? Are there so few magical communities in...Canada? I thought it a thriving country."

Harry dipped his head in agreement. "Canada is quite a large country; approximately thirty-six times that of Great Britain if my memory serves me. It includes flourishing metropolises as well as more rural areas. My parents chose a more rustic area for their home."

"How...quaint," sneered his host. "So you grew up without the benefits of a magical community. Were you forced to practice Muggle traditions and observe their holidays or did your parents permit you to follow the wizarding mores and customs?"

Harry tried to keep his irritation out of his voice at the condescending tone of his host's questions. "My parents believed in a well-rounded education and encouraged me to experience both worlds," he responded. He looked at his host and said, "Didn't you also grow up in the Muggle world until Hogwarts, sir?"

Slytherin's eyes narrowed, as if Harry had touched upon a forbidden topic. "It is due to my background that I know that a Muggle setting for a magical child is not an appropriate environment," he replied

coldly. "Muggles have no idea how to respond to typical accidental magic events."

Harry thought about how Petunia and Vernon punished him by locking him in his cupboard for days after he had an accidental magic outburst and inclined his head in agreement. "I've always thought that the families of Muggleborn children should be contacted before or at the least immediately after they exhibit accidental magic for the first time. The parents or guardians should be taught what to expect, support groups should be formed among the parents, and the children should be exposed to literature, like 'The Tales of Beedle the Bard', giving them an introduction to wizarding society. The family or guardians shouldn't be left to muddle through on their own with no assistance."

"You speak as if every Muggle family welcomes a magical child. What if the magical child is abused by their family or guardian?" sneered Slytherin.

"Then remove them from the environment," Harry said promptly. "Abuse is abuse, whether the child is magical or not. No child deserves to be abused."

Slytherin stared at Harry through distant eyes that revealed nothing of his thoughts. With a small movement, he snapped his fingers and Gaspar appeared again with a quiet pop. The elf refilled both tea cups and disappeared again.

The older man sipped his tea as he examined his young guest. When his voice was once again neutral, he said, "Many witches and wizards would disagree with your proposal, Mr. Black. They would believe that magical children should be removed from non-magical homes as soon as possible no matter what."

"If there is no abuse, it is nothing better than kidnapping," Harry protested. How like a Blood Purist to think that children were just pawns to be moved about as if they had no emotions! "Removing a child from a loving environment is just as bad as deliberately leaving one in an abusive environment."

"Surely Muggles are too violent to permit a fragile wizarding child to remain in their custody," Slytherin argued.

"Violence can be just as easily found in the wizarding world," responded Harry. Voldemort had tried to kill him multiple times in a supposedly safe magical environment. The house rivalries too frequently exploded into violence as well. Surely the man wasn't so deluded as to believe only Muggles were violent? "A case in point would be the vandals that attempted to demolish an innocent shopkeeper's store in Diagon Alley just recently."

"Violence against children simply because they are magical is a different type of brutality," responded the older man. He sipped his tea again. "Tell me, do you frequently endanger yourself for others, Mr. Black?"

Harry arched an eyebrow at the question and then smiled self-deprecatingly. "When I was younger, I had what one friend called a 'saving people thing'. Although I hope I've matured somewhat, I occasionally relapse a bit, although instead of endangering myself, I see it as taking calculated risks."

His host arched a slim eyebrow. "Indeed?"

"Risks are a normal part of life, Lord Slytherin. If one evaluates the risks and mitigates the hazards, one can generally determine if the rewards are worth the risks."

Lord Slytherin gave him a small condescending smile, "A most discriminating perspective from one so young, Mr. Black." Harry tried not to let his irritation show. He felt as if this Tom Riddle was silently mocking him and tried to keep Salazar's lessons in mind for the verbal jousting.

"One who finds the benefits outweigh the risks of each situation and is successful in 'mitigating the hazards' may frequently find himself summoned by others to help them as well," the older man said mildly.

The younger man tried to keep his eyes from narrowing. Had there been an emphasis on 'summoned'? His heart began to beat more rapidly, which Salazar was able to hear from his position on Harry's chest. "Anyone who proves successful in any particular field may find himself frequently sought after," he replied cautiously. "I'm certain that you've experienced more than a little of that yourself, Lord Slytherin."

"Ah, but you are a different type of hero are you not, Mr. Black," was the patronizing reply. "Please take no offense, I am merely attempting to learn a bit more about you. You are the 'Hero of Diagon Alley' after all."

Harry felt the comment hit home. He hated how the Daily Prophet had alternated between calling him the Chosen One and then making him out to be a psychotic mental case. The article in the Daily Oracle had gotten him the exact same type of attention and he loathed it, which apparently this man recognized and used to taunt him. No matter what Salazar advised, he had no desire to play word games with this supercilious bastard any longer.

"One would think a man of your years would learn not to believe everything written," he ground out between nearly clenched teeth. "Now if you will excuse me, I believe I have overstayed my welcome."

Salazar heard the anger in his protégé's voice and was sure the man opposite him heard it as well. He sighed mentally; although Harry had flashes of cunning, he lacked the subtleties of a true Slytherin, unlike their host.

As Harry stood trying to conceal his loathing of Slytherin's condescending attitude, a disembodied voice said, "Enough. Remove the disillusionment, Harry."

With a barely noticeable hand movement, Slytherin's wand was in his hand and negligently pointed towards Harry, as the older man raised an elegant eyebrow.

Harry sneered at the man and slowly withdrew his wand only to point it to his own chest. With two quick spells, he removed both the disillusionment and the notice-me-not spells on the portrait. Lord Slytherin's eyes widened at the portrait hanging on his guest's chest.

"Lord Slytherin, allow me to introduce Salazar Slytherin, Founder of Hogwarts," Harry said with a self-satisfied smile at the other man's evident surprise. He cast a quick Engorgio on the portrait so that it returned to its original size and propped it on the chair next to him.

"My Lord Slytherin," the younger Slytherin said with a seated bow and a tone of what appeared to be genuine respect. "It is a pleasure to welcome you to my home."

"Lord Slytherin," the portrait responded with a slightly shallower bow, just barely putting enough of an emphasis on the title as if questioning the validity of their host to bear it. "I do hope you will forgive my interruption of the tête-à-tête you were enjoying. Although you and I would have taken pleasure in another two or three meetings where we danced with nuances and inferences, my young friend here has less appreciation of the art form of fine conversation."

"I enjoy conversation just fine," Harry protested, albeit with a grimace. He didn't fail to note that Salazar called him a 'friend', which likely revealed more to their host than he expected. "I just get frustrated with innuendoes, insinuations and intimations."

"Yet you enjoy alliterations," rejoined his host. "Perhaps you not totally lost to the art of civilized conversation."

"You questioned Mr. Black on his propensity to help others," interjected Salazar. "What interests you about that in the young man?"

The older man's lips twitched into a reluctant smile. "On paper, I admit that there is little to interest anyone about Mr. Black. My compliments to whoever fabricated his history. It certainly makes him appear to be nothing more than a slightly better than mediocre wizard with nothing exceptional to recommend him."

Salazar's lips turned upwards for a brief moment. "Of course a more discerning person might have another perspective."

"Indeed. My perspective is that Mr. Black," the emphasis on his surname indicated he in no way believed it to be his true name, "needed to have a history created because one did not already exist." He inclined his head to the younger man and took a sip of his tea. He frowned at the cup and waved the wand that was still in his hand over the it, and steam immediately appeared.

"Not every parent cares to be in the public eye," replied Salazar with mild scorn, "nor does every home-schooled child leave a long paper trail behind them."

Their host inclined his head graciously. "Quite true, Lord Slytherin. Of course, even the most secluded home-schooled child is known in the neighborhood in which he was supposed to have lived. Even the most isolated child would have been seen by at least the O.W.L. examiners."

Harry's eyes swiveled between the two Slytherins as they danced with their words. He felt his irritation grow and tried to hold on to his temper so that Salazar could draw out more information from Riddle.

"And yet you still have not explained why you are interested in my young friend," replied Salazar.

"It came to my attention that young Mr. Black was summoned from another...location," replied Slytherin with a smile. He offered a refill of tea to Harry, who declined. "That alone would attract the attention of anyone interested in the rare and unusual." He tipped his head and examined Harry with a critical eye. "Of course, when the young man in question was purportedly summoned to vanquish me, I grew more curious."

Harry felt his stomach drop. Slytherin knew why he had been summoned? "Not good," he thought, "not good at all."

"I congratulate you on your information organization," Salazar said inclining his head with respect.

"No one involved in politics and international business can survive without a chain of operatives willing to share interesting tidbits of information as it is learned," Slytherin acknowledged. He then sat and just scrutinized Harry quietly.

After several long and intensely quiet moments, Salazar said, "What have I taught you about Lord Slytherin's current tactic, Harry?"

Harry lips twitched, but he responded obediently, "Most people cannot tolerate a silence that lasts more than thirty to forty-five seconds, and will rush to fill it, typically disclosing more information than they otherwise would have."

"Quite right," Salazar replied. He looked back at his descendent and said, "Why do you imagine anyone would summon a champion to defeat you?"

"My assumption is that I am perceived as the leader of the Blood Purist movement and that someone has finally noticed the incursions they have made in our society as well as the increase in Muggleborn deaths." He picked up an apple and with a wave of the wand still in his hand, the apple began to peel itself.

"Finally noticed," repeated Harry. "You speak as though you have been watching the movement yourself."

The older man smiled mirthlessly. "Considering the care that is being taken to imply that I am involved in the movement's leadership, I would be foolish not to give it my attention, Mr. Black." He picked up a small knife and quartered the peeled apple, offered Harry a slice which the younger man declined, and then ate one of the quarters.

"Are you suggesting that you are not a Blood Purist," questioned Harry. Salazar grimaced slightly at the young man's bluntness. He needed to spend more time teaching Harry tact. Their host met his eyes and they reached a non-verbal accord to ignore the younger man's tactlessness.

"My beliefs have some similarity with the publicized propaganda of the Blood Purists, but I do not endorse all of their doctrine."

"What do you endorse, if I might ask?"

"I agree that the magical world should be kept separate from the mundane world, lest we either be expected to cure all of the world's ills," Slytherin admitted. "At best, they would be suspicious if we were unable to meet their expectations and at worst we would be hunted for our abilities. I endorse having muggleborn witches and wizards identified and initiated to the magical world at an early age, preferably through an introduction to a similar magical family. I further believe that if a muggleborn is rejected or abused by their family, they should be removed from the environment and fostered by a magical family."

He bit into another apple slice as he observed the young man before him. "I do not sanction having muggleborns denied an education or being denied advancement in our society, but neither do I believe they should expect special consideration just because they are muggleborn."

"And your thoughts on the recent increase in violence towards non purebloods?"

"Violence towards muggleborns or those of mixed parentage serves no useful purpose," Slytherin sneered. "It distracts the population and singles out one aspect of society for unmerited destructive treatment or blame. More importantly, it also establishes the practice of doing so. Once established that a single part of society may be made to take the blame for the whole, that action will be repeated in more nefarious ways, until no part will ever be safe from similar actions."

Harry shook his head in confusion. "If you don't agree with the Blood Purists actions, then why don't you do anything about the assumption that you're the leader of the group?"

Salazar and Slytherin looked at each other and exchanged subtle movements, each deploring Harry's clumsy question. "One hopes you will be able to teach this young one a semblance of subtlety at some point" Slytherin hissed in Parseltongue to the portrait.

"He came to the training late," Salazar responded in kind, "but he is not impossible to instruct."

"He is sitting right here," Harry hissed.

For the first time, the younger man saw his host stunned. He stared at Harry in disbelief, and then a calculating look appeared in his eyes. "You become more interesting every day, Mr. Black" he said softly. "I didn't know there was another Parselmouth in all of Europe." He looked at the portrait and added, "I can understand you taking him under your wing, now."

Harry tried to keep his face neutral, although inside he was screaming at himself for revealing that he understood Parseltongue to Tom Riddle. He couldn't help but wonder whether he would

escape the day alive and unharmed; either Lord Slytherin would reveal his true colors or Salazar would find a way to kill him, portrait or not.

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Chapter 14 – Back to the Library

In the last chapter:

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"Notgoodnotgoodnotgoodnotgood," Harry's mind screamed the words as Lord Slytherin examined him carefully.

"Tell me, how many generations back are you related to me, Mr. Black?" he purred.

Harry blinked in surprise. "Related to you? I'm not!" he protested vehemently.

"No? The ability to speak Parseltongue is descended through the Slytherin line only, as far as I know. You bear a remarkable resemblance to me in my younger days. You were also 'summoned' specifically to defeat me, which implies a relationship. My illustrious ancestor," he inclined his head towards Salazar's portrait, "found you worthy to train. It is a reasonable conclusion that you are at the very least related through a cadet branch of the Family."

Harry's eyes darted to the portrait as if seeking advice, but Salazar was focused on their host with an intent gaze.

"We could solve the puzzle easily if you would give me a sample of your blood," Slytherin suggested. "A hereditary test can be conducted rather quickly."

Harry narrowed his eyes at the older man, even as he twitched his wrist which caused his wand to fall into his hand. "My blood stays in my veins," he snapped. "The fact that I am a Parselmouth is irrelevant to any other discussion we might have." He smirked suddenly and added, "Besides, with all the inbreeding in the wizarding world, there is probably a Muggle in every pureblood line and a pureblood in every supposed Muggle-born's ancestry." He gripped his wand tightly and tried to evaluate his chances of escaping the estate intact.

"You are in my home under my wards..." began Slytherin softly with distinct menace in his voice.

"Enough," Salazar commanded imperiously. "Unless you each seriously intend to attack one another, resulting in irreconcilable differences, you should replace your wands." His dark eyes bored into both of the living men's gazes. "Any blood relationship is meaningless at this time, unless of course," a smirk broke across his painted features as he focused his gaze on his descendent, "your objective is to gain an heir. If that is your intent, then I suggest you recognize that threats and attempted subjugation will lessen your likelihood of success."

"An heir!" Harry gasped, staring at the portrait in shock.

Their host rolled his eyes and made a point of storing his wand back inside his sleeve and looked pointedly at Harry. The younger man

reluctantly returned his wand to the arm holster and inclined his head at Slytherin.

"At least neither of you is totally incapable of common sense," growled the portrait, "although I expect a little more perspicacity from one bearing my name or from a student of mine."

"Perhaps another topic would prove more amenable," their host suggested suavely. "The common understanding is that there were no enchanted portraits of the Founders, only mundane ones." He looked at Salazar. "One wonders why a millennium has gone by without you having been revealed."

Salazar smiled and inclined his head towards their host. "We each had an enchanted portrait, but we wanted Hogwarts to grow based on the prevailing world and customs, not those of our era. We each secured a portrait in an obscure location that permitted us to observe what was happening in the school through visiting other portraits, without following generations becoming dependent on our knowledge and beliefs. Each generation should stand on its own."

This was a subject that Harry had never raised with the portrait and he couldn't help interject, "Then why have enchanted portraits at all if not to advise your successors?"

"We exist purely as safeguards," Salazar responded. "If the school ever fell into the grasp of those that would fail to follow the basic tenets of the charter, whether by endangering the students or failing to provide a proper education, then our portraits have the ability to secure control of the building and its wards."

"That does not explain why you revealed yourself now," interjected Slytherin.

"My young friend gained access to my concealed location, and to be candid, I was rather bored after sleeping so much. He seemed like a bright young lad and I decided that perhaps it was time to dust off my portrait and become more involved with the students again."

"Or at least one student," countered his descendent glancing at Harry, to which Salazar inclined his head in silent agreement.

"In my youth, I traveled to the Far East," offered Salazar. "I explored a variety of rich and remarkable cultures, both magical and non-magical. At that time, one of the non-magical philosophers acquainted me of what an old adage that they called a 'curse'. Specifically, 'May you live in interesting times.'" He smirked at the living Slytherin. "I do believe you are experiencing that curse."

"The times are only as interesting as one makes them," responded Slytherin with a half smile. "One can look upon the churning waves and bemoan the fates that one cannot swim, or one can choose to take control one's destiny and build a bridge to span the turbulent waters." He arched an eyebrow at the painting. "I prefer to turn the interesting times to my advantage."

"As any well-trained Slytherin would," muttered Harry, trying not to roll his eyes.

"Precisely," agreed Salazar.

Their host stared at Harry for several long moments, as if trying to uncover his secrets, but the younger man didn't feel the touch of Legilimens on his mind. "Are you certain you wouldn't like to perform a hereditary analysis, Mr. Black?"

"Quite certain, Lord Slytherin," Harry said firmly.

"A pity. It would likely explain a great deal, perhaps even elements of which you are unaware."

"Why do I suspect that you are keeping more secrets than you are telling me, Lord Slytherin," Harry questioned with a barely discernable sneer.

"I do not know, Mr. Black," their host replied with equanimity. "However, if I may be so bold, are you revealing everything to me?"

Harry couldn't prevent his mouth from twitching in amusement. As if he would tell Tom Riddle everything! "At this point in time, I have revealed all that I can. Obviously, as we learn to trust one another, I may be able to share more."

The older man smirked at his guest, yet managed to said with silky civility, "Quite so, my young friend, quite so."

Harry sat down heavily on the chair before the fireplace and sighed heavily. "I wasn't sure we were going to get out of there alive or with our memories intact," he admitted to Salazar.

"I am a portrait," Salazar responded coldly. "I would have simply left my frame for another portrait if he tried to restrain me. Considering that you not only allowed your temper to get the better of you causing me to disclose myself prematurely, but that you also revealed that you were a Parselmouth for no discernable benefit, I too am surprised at your continued survival," Salazar continued acidly.

Harry slumped in the chair and ducked his head in embarrassment. "I know," he said. "But I wasn't born and raised a Slytherin. I don't take being sneered at very well, much less from someone who is the clone of the murderous lunatic who tried to kill me." He waved a hand at the portrait when Salazar opened his mouth to speak. "I understand he's not the same person," he added rapidly. "I realize that this Riddle never found the Chamber and never sent the basilisk to kill the muggleborns. But he's close enough."

"He stated that he wasn't the leader of the Blood Purist movement and that he disagreed with many of their aims," Salazar reminded him.

"Oh please, even I don't believe that without proof," Harry responded dismissively. "He's a Slytherin; he's cunning and sly. If he was cornered, of course he would bring his powers of persuasion to bear to try to convince us that he's the innocent victim of a mass conspiracy." He narrowed his eyes at the portrait. "Don't tell you fell for his act!"

Salazar sneered at the younger man. "As if a man of my years, after a lifetime of dealing with recalcitrant students would take anything at face value," he replied. "My recommendation is that you make it a priority to go back through the key Wizengamot votes for the last two decades and analyze exactly what he did and didn't support. From there we can determine whether he supported something to gain comparable aid from a key Wizengamot member for his own agenda, or whether his voting record is consistently against muggleborns, half-bloods and non-humans."

Harry groaned and dropped his face to his hands. "Back to the library?" he whined.

"Back to the library," Salazar confirmed unsympathetically.

Between the Quidditch coaching, auditing NEWT level classes, researching Slytherin's votes in the Wizengamot and Sirius seeking him out every other evening, Harry was exhausted as he slipped into bed every night. Fortunately, his now weekly sessions with Preston helped him alleviate some of the stress he was under. With Preston's encouragement, Harry slowly learned how to control his emotions better, although Voldemort's knowledge of Occlumency also helped. Why his world's Snape had never mentioned meditation techniques to help with clearing the mind...well, the snarky git hadn't wanted to teach him and resented every moment. Of course he didn't go out of his way to help him. As it was, all of the teen's activities resulted in him tumbling into bed exhausted every night.

Harry awoke suddenly and looked around his bed chamber. Had someone called him? His wand was in his hand in moments and he cast a quick Lumos. The room brightened enough for him to confirm that there was no one there. He slipped out into the outer room and searched it quickly, then padded back to his room disgruntled at being awakened. He slipped back under the sheet and placed his wand under his pillow again.

Within moments he was sitting up again, having felt the mental equivalent of a poke. "Oh, come on!" he muttered. Tempus told him it was just before midnight. He lay back upon his pillow and began to clear his mind only to get a more painful mental poke that brought him upright again.

"What the bloody hell," he mumbled. Well, whatever 'it' was, it wasn't going to let him sleep again, so he quickly dressed and slipped his wand into his forearm holster. If he was back home, he would think that Voldemort was harassing him through his scar, but that had been dormant since he arrived.

The mental tug became more insistent and Harry growled, "OK, OK, I'm going. You better not be leading me into a trap." He kept his wand in his hand as he left his quarters. The insistent wrenching led him down to the Entrance Hall. When he paused to look around for anyone, another mental tug pulled him towards the great double

doors. A quick spell lifted the evening ward and opened the door, allowing Harry to slip out into the cold almost-Spring night.

Another jerk pulled him towards the west, but he paused to cast a Disillusionment spell on himself and another to silence his footsteps before he hurried in the direction indicated. The pulling was almost painful now and he was nearly running as he reached the Quidditch pitch.

Ribbons of silver moonlight stretched down to the frost-covered grass, illuminating a harsh furrow in the ground. Seeing a dark shadow at the end of the groove, he hastened his steps. A figure lay broken on the cold ground; a shattered broomstick gave silent evidence as to the cause of the injury. Harry reached down and felt the cold neck for a pulse and breathed a sigh of relief at finally feeling a feeble and almost imperceptible beat.

He cast a Patronus charm quickly. "Tell Madam Pomfrey that I'm bringing in an injured student." The silver stag raced off, and Harry cast a warming charm on what appeared to be a young man and then conjured a stretcher. He carefully levitated the student onto the stretcher and then with a shrug, added the broken broomstick as well.

As he turned back towards the castle, he realized the mental tug had lessened, but that he still felt a sense of urgency, although now it led him in the direction of the Infirmary. He hurried towards the Infirmary and was pleased to see Madame Pomfrey in the doorway waiting for him.

"Lay him down in this bed," she said firmly, already beginning a diagnostics spell. In the bright light of the Infirmary, he could make out the bruised features of Sebastian Potter. He levitated the young man to the bed and then as an after-thought moved the broom pieces onto the night side table.

"I cast a warming charm on him, then a levitation to put him on the stretcher before floating it here," Harry explained, knowing that magic could potentially interfere with some potions.

"Your warming charm probably prevented the onset of hypothermia," Poppy said approvingly. "It appears he has a mild concussion, dislocated shoulder, a fracture to one wrist and a sprain to the other,

as well as a variety of contusions." With a sweep of her wand, she finished the diagnostic spell and turned back towards her office to collect potions. Over her shoulder she said, "I assumed the shattered broom has something to do with his condition?"

"I found him on the Quidditch pitch," Harry admitted. "I think he was practicing some moves and lost control and crashed."

Poppy glared at the teen and shook her head, even as she arranged the potions and began feeding them to him. "Quidditch again! Flying alone at night! I swear the sport should be banned at the school. Well, he's going to find himself on the injury list and banned for flying for the next week thanks to those stunts." She continued to mutter about "reckless children" and their "obsessive House Heads who encouraged such behavior".

"Shall I inform Professor McGonagall," Harry asked quietly, trying to keep the woman's ire from being directed at him as an assistant Quidditch coach.

"No thank you, Mr. Black," the matron said grimly. "I will take that duty on myself." She finished feeding the vials to Sebastian and turned towards her office with a severe expression. Harry almost felt sorry for Professor McGonagall.

Harry stopped by the Infirmary before breakfast the next morning to check on his pseudo brother, shaking his head even as the description floated in his mind. This was not his brother. His parents died before they could have more children. 'But if they had lived, perhaps they might have had twins,' his heart responded to his mind.

He walked into the Infirmary to see Sebastian sitting up in bed. The boy's eyes widened and then dropped upon seeing Harry and his face slowly flushed. Harry hid a grin at the younger boy's embarrassment.

"Good morning, Mr. Black," Sebastian said uncomfortably. "Madame Pomfrey said you were the one to find me and bring me in. Thank you, sir."

"How are you feeling," asked Harry. "Have you gagged down a glut of potions so far this morning?"

At the boy's surprised expression, he added, "Did you expect me to immediately chew you out?" At Sebastian's tentative nod, Harry chuckled and said, "I doubt anyone could do better than Madame Pomfrey." The younger teen met his eyes with a wry smile, causing Harry to add, "Unless of course, it's your Mother. I'm sure Madame Pomfrey has already notified your parents."

Sebastian groaned and ran a hand through his hair in a gesture that Harry recognized. "She's going to strip the paint from the walls when she gets here," he muttered.

Harry sat in the chair by the bed. "Tell me, what if you found your sister's broken and bloodied body on the Quidditch pitch and realized that she had been practicing moves in the dark without a spotter?" An image must have sprung to the teen's mind, because his face paled dramatically. "And if you feel that way about your sister, can you even try to imagine how you would feel if it was a child you carried in your own body, gave birth to, fed, cared and sang to? A child you looked after and loved for so many years? A child you would die to protect?"

Sebastian swallowed hard. "You're pretty good at chewing someone out without sounding like you're doing so."

Harry chuckled and patted the younger teen's shoulder. "Tell you what...after carrying your scrawny carcass through the school in the dead of the night; I think we're familiar enough that you can call me Harry outside of Quidditch practice."

Sebastian gave him a rueful smile. "Thank you...Harry. And I do appreciate you hauling my 'scrawny carcass' here. How did you find me, anyways?"

"That's probably a story for another time," Harry said with a tight smile as he stood up. "You do what Madame Pomfrey tells you and look appropriately repentant, and maybe she'll let you out of here a little bit early."

Sebastian wondered what his Quidditch coach was avoiding, but nodded and said, "Thanks again, Harry. I'll try to remember what you said when Mum comes."

Harry grinned at the younger boy and waved cheerfully. As he neared the door, the Matron came out of her office. Sebastian had to grin at the flirtatious, "Poppy! You're looking lovely this morning! Would you care to join me for breakfast?" He couldn't hear Madame Pomfrey's response, but saw the blush and the swat she aimed at the younger man's arm. He dodged and blew her a kiss as he left, leaving her shaking her head with a bemused smile on her lips.

She turned back towards Sebastian and the smile dropped as she shook her head at his hopeful look. "You stay right where you're at, Mr. Potter. I'll have a house elf bring a breakfast tray up for you. You'll want some sustenance before your parents arrive." She hid a chuckle as he slumped back on his pillows with a resigned look.

A young Hufflepuff visited the Infirmary for a stomach soothing potion before her first class. After listening in horror at Lily Potter's tirade towards her son, she backed away from the doorway and decided that she could endure an upset stomach more than she could tolerate moving any closer to the furious red-headed woman a few yards away. By noon, the rant had made it around the school causing the Weasleys to flinch in commiseration, as it seemed comparable to a Molly Weasley dressing-down.

When Sebastian wandered into the Great Hall for lunch before joining his afternoon classes, he had to suffer the Slytherin's laughter and the Gryffindor Quidditch team's empathy, although his sister's lecture moved him to open his mouth to object, until he remembered Harry's comment about how he would feel if he had found Holly's broken and bloodied body.

"Are you listening to me," Holly hissed at him, her temper rivaling their mother's.

Sebastian laid a hand on her arm. "I know I was stupid and reckless," he said softly. "I should never have gone out at night and I should never have been without a spotter. I'm sorry I scared you. I won't do it again." His quiet sincerity made her stop in mid-harangue.

"Hmph. See that you don't," his sister responded. "I don't like finding out my brother nearly died from stupidity. It effects my reputation as well, you know."

He grinned at her and nodded, accepting her forgiveness gratefully. His friends gave a sigh of relief as the sibling tension decreased.

"Did I tell you that Harry Black is the one that found me," he asked.

His sister looked at him in surprise. "Mr. Black? What was he doing out at that time of night," Holly asked with a small frown. "He might be an assistant coach, but it was pretty late, wasn't it?"

Hermione's stopped eating and stared at her plate for several long moments and then raised widened eyes towards Sebastian. "The summoning ritual..." Neville realized what she meant and closed his eyes as if in pain.

"What do you mean, Hermione," asked Ron, pausing with his fork halfway to his mouth. "What about the ritual?"

"Don't you remember, Ron," said Neville brusquely. "We used blood in the summoning. It was supposed to be mine, so that whoever was summoned would want to help and protect me. But it wasn't my blood that was used, because I forgot the dagger. Sebastian used his blood."

'Ron's face would have looked comical with his mouth rounded into an "oh" if it hadn't been so serious,' thought Sebastian. "I asked him how he found me, and he said it was a story for another time," whispered the teen.

Hermione nodded and murmured softly so that only their friends could hear, "The spell might have pointed him in your direction. You were certainly in need of aid and protection."

Holly frowned and shook her head. "I didn't think it was supposed to be a coercion type of spell, just something to give the person a favorable attitude towards Neville."

"I should never have brought that ritual to everyone's attention without having done due diligence in the research," whispered Hermione, her voice breaking on the words. "What must he think of us?"

Sebastian ran his hand through his hair, feeling dismayed at the after effects of the ritual. "Do you think that's why he said I could call

him Harry outside of class? Because he felt a compulsion from the spell?"

Ron looked at him in surprise. "He told you to call him by his first name?"

"He said that after carrying my...and I quote 'scrawny carcass through the school in the dead of the night', we were familiar enough that I could use his given name. If that was part of the spell, it's just...wrong," muttered Sebastian. "No one should be compelled to act a certain way because of a spell. That's almost as bad as the Imperius curse!"

"No," responded Hermione flatly. "A compulsion is more of an inclination to do something. It can be ignored if the person objected to it. If you told him to jump off the Astronomy tower, it doesn't mean he would do it, because he knew it would be lethal. But not that many people can fight the Imperius, and if they were told to jump, they would do so. It's not the same."

"That doesn't make it right," argued Sebastian.

"No, it doesn't," agreed Hermione quietly. The other teens nodded in solemn agreement.

Sebastian stood up and looked around. "He's not here now. I need to talk to him. Maybe he's in the library again. He seems to spend a lot of time there."

"It's only thirty minutes until class," said Hermione. "But I'll come with you. I owe him an apology as well."

"We all do, I think," said Neville, also standing. The other teens stood and together they headed for the library.

The teens found the assistant Quidditch coach in the periodical section, surrounded by old newspapers and muttering. He paused to write comments on one of several parchments stacked near his elbow. The teens paused near his table and shifted uncomfortably until Harry looked up and raised an eyebrow at them.

"I'm sorry to bother you H..Mr. Black," Sebastian began nervously, "but we think there's something you should know."

Harry waved them to seats around the table. "Sorry for the mess, I'm doing quite a bit of research," he said with a rueful smile.

Hermione instantly looked interested, but a nudge from Holly reminded her of their purpose.

"Now what's so important that I need to know," Harry asked with an affable smile.

"Well, sir..." began Sebastian. He paused and looked at Hermione with pleading eyes.

"We think the summoning ritual did more than bring you to this world," began Hermione.

Harry kept a bland, but vaguely interested look on his face. "Oh?"

"Yes sir, we think the blood component of the ritual may have affected you in a way we didn't anticipate," continued Hermione.

"Indeed," murmured Harry. "In what way?"

"The blood was supposed to give you the inclination to support the person whose blood was used...but..." Hermione gulped and then took a deep breath and continued in true Gryffindor fashion. "We think it may have affected you in other ways. You were the one that found Sebastian...in the dark...well after curfew...we think the ritual may have caused you to seek him out and aid him."

Harry leaned back in his chair and examined each of the teens. They all looked guilty and remorseful. "You didn't consider the ramifications of using a wizard's blood in a magical ritual? Blood rituals are usually considered dark for a reason; they either are used to harm someone or they are used without the blood donor's permission." The students shifted uncomfortably.

"However, not every blood ritual is dark. There are blood wards that are used to protect families; there are blood tracking spells used to find lost children. It's usually all in the intent." He shifted his gaze to Neville Longbottom who appeared deeply ashamed. "Your intent was to help your friend, but at the expense of another. You never even considered the impact of the other, nor did you perform due

diligence in your research." He looked back at Hermione who now bore a humiliated expression.

With a sigh, he continued, "You are quite correct. The ritual did cause me to seek out Mr. Potter and offer him aid when he was injured." He pinned Sebastian with a sharp look. "However, I don't expect Mr. Potter to place himself at such risk again."

"No sir. Not after Madame Pomfrey, you, my Mum and even Holly got through with me. I won't ever do something like that again."

Harry allowed another smile, this one of approval to flit across his lips. "In that case, I thank you for being brave enough to tell me about your concerns. Unfortunately..." he waved at the stacks of newspapers, "I still have quite a bit of research to do."

"Can we help, sir," asked Hermione. "It's the least we could do."

Harry raised an eyebrow and another smile twitched his lips. "I'm researching Lord's Slytherin's Wizengamot voting records for the last twenty years, cross-referencing them by topic by date by sponsor and by what margin the vote passed or failed. If you want to help, take a paper."

"Lord Slytherin," gasped Neville in shock. "After everything we've done, you're still looking into helping us?"

"It's always worthwhile to be well-informed, Mr. Longbottom," Harry responded with a smile.

"We have class in a few minutes, but we would all be happy to help after classes are done, wouldn't we," exclaimed Hermione eagerly, staring down the others.

"Of course we will," added Holly. The boys nodded their agreement, albeit a bit less enthusiastically.

"Your help will be appreciated," replied Harry, hiding a smug smile at gaining the extra help. After the teens left, he cast a 'notice-me-not' spell on the table and sauntered off to the NEWT Charms class he was auditing.

Holly matched her stride to Sebastian's, knowing that other students thought it was some odd "twin" thing when they walked in tandem, their bodies in perfect synchronization. However, it was more of a trick that they played, a prank their father seemed to appreciate.

The twins followed Neville who was flanked by Hermione and Ron down the corridor towards to the library to meet Harry Black.

"I don't understand why you had to volunteer all of our time," grumbled Ron ahead of them. "You're the one that's good at research."

"Honestly Ron, don't you think we all owe the man a little help?" Hermione glared meaningfully at the red-head, who immediately backed down.

"Guess so," he admitted. "But I don't know how much help I'll really be."

"Sebastian," Holly whispered, indicating with brief eye contact that they should let the others gain a few steps on them. Once she was certain they wouldn't be overheard, she whispered, "I was thinking about how Mr. Black found you. Even if it was a result of the spell, you would have died without his help. Do you think you owe him a life debt?"

Sebastian met his sister's eyes squarely and nodded slowly. "I've been thinking of that myself. Neither Mum nor Dad brought it up, but how could I not owe him a debt? Unless us summoning him caused his life to be saved, and this just canceled that debt."

Holly shook her head. "I thought about that, but he didn't come willingly. We basically wrenched him away from his world. He would have died, but our actions were self-serving, not selfless."

"So I probably do owe him a life debt. I wish I knew more about him or about his life growing up. You know, he's never mentioned anything about the Potters since he's been here. We learned that he knew the Weasleys and Hermione and Neville, but he's never mentioned us or Mum and Dad."

Holly paused suddenly and her brother looked at her questioningly. She raised wide eyes to him. "Sebastian, maybe he didn't know us, but he knew Harry Potter!"

Sebastian blinked and began walking again when his sister nudged him. "Do you think Harry didn't die in his world?"

"I don't know," Holly admitted, "but I would like to find out."

The twins hurried to catch up to their friends and headed towards the table near the Periodical section where they had found Harry Black earlier. He was again surrounded by newspapers and gave them a welcoming smile.

"I wasn't sure I would actually see you again," he admitted with a grin. "I have a feeling that only Miss Granger actually enjoys research." Hermione flushed and the other teens chortled at her embarrassment.

"She's the most brilliant witch of our year," said Holly proudly. "First in most of the courses, although Neville is always first in Herbology." Both friends blushed at her praise.

"Well, if you want to help, I'm looking up Lord Slytherin's Wizengamot voting record. I want to know what votes he supported and which ones he didn't. These parchments around me have columns to indicate the topic, the date of the vote, who sponsored it and by what margin the vote it passed or failed. If Slytherin spoke out to the papers either in support of or against the legislation, I want to get a copy of his comments."

The teens settled around the table, each with a small stack of newspapers and their own copy of the parchment records that Harry was keeping. Hermione seemed fascinated with the work, while the others appeared more resigned. Harry had to duck his head to hide the smirk at the extra help. This would take days off the effort!

Over the next two hours, there was little talk, except when one student found an interesting article that they shared with the others. Holly finally found her chance to question Harry Black when Neville said, "Here's one about your Dad, Sebastian and Holly. It's when he earned a Distinguished Service award for capturing that murderer who was preying on teenaged Muggleborns." He read the article

and Holly noticed that even their Quidditch coach was listening with avid interest as Neville read.

"Did you know our Dad in your world, Mr. Black," Holly asked innocently. Sebastian looked up and watched the exchange with interest.

"No, I'm afraid I don't recall meeting him," Harry managed to say quietly.

"And you didn't know Sebastian or me either," Holly persevered.

"No, although I did know the Patil and Weasley twins," Harry responded. Hermione looked up at that comment and frowned slightly, a clear indication that she was trying to unknot a puzzle to those that knew her.

"Did you happen to know our older brother," Sebastian interjected in support of his sister's questions. "Or did he die as a baby in your world as well?"

"I..I may have heard of your brother," acknowledged Harry. "I don't think I could say that I knew him."

Both Holly and Sebastian stared at the older teen. "He was alive in your world? He went to Hogwarts? What can you tell us about him? Mum and Dad would love to know!"

Harry wondered if he looked as uncomfortable as he felt. This was not a discussion he wanted to have and he didn't want the Potters questioning them about the Harry Potter of his world.

"I can't say that I knew him," he repeated rather desperately. He cast a quick Tempus and said, "I think that's enough for tonight. If you would pass me your parchments, I'll update them onto the master tonight. I do appreciate all of your help tonight, but certainly understand if this type of dry research is less interesting than waiting for a potion to boil." Within a few minutes, he gathered the parchments and bid the teens good night.

"Well, that was interesting," Holly said slowly.

"He definitely didn't want to talk about your older brother," agreed Neville. "Perhaps he just felt uncomfortable knowing that he was murdered here and didn't want to be questioned by your parents?"

"Or perhaps using Sebastian's blood in the ritual had an even greater impact that we anticipated," said Hermione slowly.

Holly stared at Hermione as her own mind raced through questions and possible answers. "You know, Sirius was our Harry's godfather and was named his heir as he wasn't married. If Sirius had died without children and our Harry survived, he could have legally been able to take the name Harry Potter Black."

Ron looked confused between the two girls. "What are you two going on about?"

"I think my sister and Hermione are wondering if using Potter blood summoned someone with Potter blood from another world," said Sebastian hoarsely. He stared at Holly and held a silent conversation with her. "I think Holly and I are going to go see Sirius before curfew. We'll see you later."

The other teens watched the twins disappear out of the library. Neville looked at Hermione and asked, "You don't really think that Harrison Black is Harry Potter, do you?"

The bookish brunette shook her head distractedly. "I don't know, Neville. I really don't know." It sounded as if it pained her to admit it.

Sirius looked up with a smile on his face when the portrait announced he had visitors. He hoped it was Harry again, but then realized the portrait had mentioned visitors as in more than one. He gave the password that allowed the guardian portrait to swing open, revealing his Sebastian and Holly.

"Come in, squirts! It's good to see you! What brings you to see old Padfoot? In need of ideas for a prank? I have a good idea I've been saving to prank your father," he smirked disingenuously as he tried to tempt them. "Have a seat," he added as they stood there looking a bit uncomfortable.

Holly took a seat across from her the man she called "Unca Siri" until she was at least six years old. "Sirius, it's about the ritual we

used to summon Harrison Black here," she began. She noticed that his face immediately froze and then changed immediately to one of bland interest. A quick sideways glance showed that Sebastian had seen the same expression.

"What about the ritual," the old Marauder asked.

"Well, do you think using Sebastian's blood impacted who was summoned?" Holly turned wide innocent eyes towards the older man.

"In what way?" responded Sirius. He knew his students and especially Prongs' children well enough not to offer any information to suspicious questions until he had the full picture of what was going on.

Sebastian glanced at Holly, then Sirius and finally the older man's desk. Holly gave no indication that she had seen him, but continued to ask, "Do you think it would have summoned a Potter?"

Sirius blinked at Holly's perceptive question, but his vow kept him from a candid answer. However, he could hedge a bit. "Although he was Muggle-raised, with all the inter-marrying, it's possible that Harrison Black has a Potter somewhere in his ancestry. I know that one of my grandmothers married Charlus Potter a few generations back, so we're related by blood ourselves."

Without looking in Sebastian's direction, he pointed his wand over his shoulder and turned the teen's hair green. "Did you two really think you could out-smart a Marauder?" He turned and looked at the green-haired teen and couldn't hide a smirk. "Just what did you think you were going to find in my desk, Pup?"

"I wanted to borrow your Marauder's Map," Sebastian admitted.

"Now you both know that I promised your mother I wouldn't give either of you that map. I value my skin too much to break that promise," he said. "Your Mum is downright scary when she's mad; as you should know, Sebastian. Do you really want another rant so soon after the late night flying fiasco?"

Sebastian sighed heavily. "No, but the ritual caused Harry to help me when I was injured. I can't help but think we might have pulled

someone with Potter blood from his world. And he admitted that Harry Potter wasn't dead in his world, but said he didn't really know him."

"So you two think you summoned Harry Potter's doppelganger?" He gave a serious look at both teens. "Don't make that suggestion to your parents. It took both of them a long time to recover from losing both him and Moony that night."

The teens glanced at each other; they hadn't considered how it would impact their parents other than being interested in learning about the double of their son. But it could open up all the pain and grief; sorrow they had both seen at the end of every July when their older brother's birthday rolled around.

"You're right, Sirius," Holly said softly. "I wouldn't want to hurt Mum and Dad." Sebastian nodded his agreement.

"All right, squirts. Now why don't I call for some tea and biscuits and you can tell me about what else is happening in your lives. It seems I never get to spend enough time with you."

After a relaxed hour of easy conversation, and filled with tea and biscuits, the teens headed back to the Gryffindor dorms. Once they were two hallways away, Holly said, "What did you think?"

"I think he's hiding something," replied Sebastian promptly.

"So we try Uncle Peter?"

"Exactly," agreed her brother, "and soon before Padfoot warns him."

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Chapter 15 – What's In A Name?

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"Exactly," agreed her brother, "and soon before Padfoot warns him."

Harry found himself back in the Chamber of Secrets after leaving the students in the library. Being asked if he knew Harry Potter shook him up more than he expected.

A slithering sound approached him across the immense stone floor. "What botherss you, sspeaker?" asked Shasanae. Her large tongue flicked out tasting the air around him. "Ssomeone hass disstressedd you?"

"The ones that look like my friendss from my own world began assking whether I knew Harry Potter," the teen attempted to explain.

Shasanae's large head tipped towards him. "Isss that not the name you ssaid wass your own? They assked whether you knew yourssself?"

"I didn't tell everyone my real name," Harry reminded the massive basilisk. "But the onesss like my friendss may have sstarted to realize that I may be more than I admitted to."

"Humanssss," the basilisk responded with amusement. "Sso much ado about sso little. You are who are, regardless of the name you use. You are a sspeaker, you are a man, you are Ssalazar Ssslytherinss sstudent, you are a wizzard, you are a vissitor from another world. Doess any of thiss change because of your name?"

Harry had to smile at the colossal basilisk's straightforward perspective. "No, it doess not change. But having otherss know my true name could causse complicationss I am not ready to handle."

The basilisk turned a yellow eye on the teen, the inner lid closed to prevent injury. "Ssso you hide down here to avoid thosse complicationss, yess?" When Harry looked away in embarrassment, she made a hissing sound that he recognized as her laughter. "Asss long asss you are hiding, you may asss well make yourssself usseful and explore more. I am certain that Ssalazar would like to know the condition of his roomss. "

Harry's interest soared as he remembered the study that Salazar had briefly shown him, and recalled him mentioning a bed chamber and potions lab as well.

He moved to the far wall until he reached a section of the wall that held an inlaid snake engraving. "Open Study," he commanded, remembering the instructions the portrait had given. Immediately, the snake receded into the wall, which shimmered briefly before an ornate wooden door appeared.

Harry opened the door and smiled broadly that his memory of the amazing room was accurate. Obviously some house elves had been down here at the portrait's request, as what was once dust-coated was now pristine. He moved eagerly towards the rich wooden shelves, temporarily avoiding the wall filled with tightly rolled scrolls. He let his eyes roam over the ancient books, most with no titles on

their spines. He finally stopped at one leather-bound book that appeared to be in better condition than others. He gently lifted it from the shelf and looked at the cover. "Healing Magicks for the Minde and Soule" was the engraved title.

He reverently opened the book, and discovered the pages were finer quality vellum rather than standard parchment. While it was hard to decipher the occasional odd spelling from ancient days, the teen was fascinated with the material. The author found that many patients "waxed under cloude-filled welkin, their soules did cry for the feel of sun upon their shoulders" and offered different treatments for those that suffered so, including "recurring dinners of fish and such mushrooms as are not poisonous". "This sounds like Sunshine or Seasonal Affective Disorder," he murmured to himself. "It was known back then?"

Harry hesitated to touch any other books, as Salazar had mentioned casting impermeable spells, but that it would be prudent to ensure the charms had not deteriorated over time, and that he would consider the best approach. The teen sighed and gently replaced the book on the shelf, eying the other tomes with a wistful look. However, he wasn't about to risk anything crumbling at his touch.

He walked throughout the study, but every wall appeared to be filled with books, with no space for a hidden door to either the bed chamber or potions lab. Finally he hissed in Parseltongue, "Open bed chamber".

He heard the slight sound, as if gears were turning, and then one wall of shelves began to swing outwards into the room. "Of course," Harry chuckled, "Salazar would have hidden it." As he approached the room, crystal orbs embedded in the ceiling lit up the ceiling, illuminating the room with gentle light.

A large elaborate bed dominated the room, with an ornamented canopy and richly-embroidered hangings. Harry couldn't help but push on the bed and discovered a soft featherbed under the fine linen sheets. To his surprise, the large pillow wasn't in a pillow case although a soft cloth was laid over the pillow resting on a sheet-draped bolster. "I guess they didn't have pillowcases back then," he thought to himself.

He noticed that the bed wasn't the same as the four poster beds that he remembered from his years in the Gryffindor dormitories, but instead had hangings draped from a frame suspended from the ceiling beam. The canopy itself was embroidered with an emerald serpent inside a silver circle.

Looking around the room the stone chamber, he realized the tapestries on the walls were more than just decorations, although they were magnificent works of art. They seemed to give a history of the area, Harry realized. One had Hogwarts castle under construction, while another showed it nearly completed with only the Astronomy tower still being built. Another tapestry showed the unicorns and centaurs of the Forbidden Forest. Another showed students sitting down at a feast in the Great Hall. As rich as the colors were and as colorful as the topics, Harry realized they helped warm the room and kept the dampness away.

He spotted a door and opened it to reveal a small anteroom, holding several chests and multiple pegs on the walls holding ancient robes that had apparently been spelled to be impermeable, as they appeared to be ready to wear. He wanted to open the chests, but decided to wait for Salazar's permission. He didn't need to see the man's undergarments after all!

He made up his mind to return with Salazar as soon as possible to see more. He didn't want to harm the ancient manuscripts or damage any antique clothing through his fumbling. In the same way, he wasn't about to look through the man's potion lab and potentially cause harm through breaking any wards on the room.

He exited the bed chamber and study and turned to a door visible on his left, remembering it was a tunnel that brought him to the Hogwarts kitchen. He again admired the crystal orbs that provided the ambient lighting, and wondered why anyone would prefer candlelight to these.

At the end of the tunnel, he swung open the door into the kitchen and was immediately met with dozens of eyes staring at him.

"Young master!" "Master Black is here!" "What can we be making for the young Master?" He was surrounded by several of the elves purposefully leading him to a table. To his surprise, Nebby pushed her way through the small crowd and ordered them back to work.

"Nebby will be helping the young Master," she said with a stern voice to the others. She turned back to Harry with a bright smile and asked, "What may Nebby get for Master Harry?"

"Well, I did miss dinner," he acknowledged. Nebby's eyes widened and he heard gasps of dismay from the other elves in the kitchen. Almost immediately dishes began to appear on the table. A basket of biscuits and a variety of butters and jams was first, followed by a meat pie and a steaming bowl of mashed potatoes. When he heard Nebby arguing with another elf about whether to prepare a roast chicken for him, he quickly said, "This will be plenty, thank you very much!"

"Is the Master certain he wouldn't like more? Something to drink? Or perhaps a treacle tart," Nebby offered, looking at the heavily laden table with a critical eye.

Harry perked up; he did love treacle tarts. Immediately two of the pastries appeared on the table, along with a pitcher of mulled pumpkin juice.

"I love Hogwarts," Harry exclaimed before tackling the small feast before him. Nebby and the other elves smiled broadly at the implied praise.

"Do you think Uncle Peter has any information on Harrison Black," Holly asked her brother as they arrived on the seventh floor. Sebastian looked around to make sure no one was there before answering.

"I don't know, but since we couldn't nick Sirius' copy of the Map, maybe we can talk Uncle Peter into giving us his copy. If the Map says Harrison Black, then we're just being nutters. But if it says Harry Potter Black, then we'll know using my blood in the ritual made a difference and Harrison Black is actually our older brother...well, in a way. Let's see if this works."

Sebastian thought powerfully, "We need a room with a working Floo" as he walked back and forth three times before the picture of Barnabas the Balmy. After he completed his third pass, a door appeared before them. Checking again to make sure no one saw them, they quickly entered the room and locked the door behind them.

Holly walked quickly to the Floo and cast a quick Incendio at the stacked logs. When the flames flared, she took the handful of Floo powder she had taken from the pot on Sirius' mantle and threw it into the flames. "Peter Pettigrew's Home," she called. She knelt before the fire and called out, "Uncle Peter?"

"They're calling now," Peter said quietly towards the mirror in his hand as he heard Holly's voice. The reflection showing wasn't his own, but that of Sirius Black.

"Give them hell," responded his friend with a wicked grin, and then the mirror went dark before it showed Peter's reflection in it. He placed the mirror back into the pocket of his robe, heaved a sigh and walked over to the fireplace.

"Holly!" he exclaimed with a good semblance of surprise. "What brings you to my Floo? Is everything all right?"

Sebastian joined Holly's head in the Floo and Peter gave them him a fond smile as well.

"Nothing's wrong, Uncle Peter. We've just run across something odd with Harrison Black and wanted to follow up on it."

Peter assumed a neutral expression. "Something odd?"

Sebastian picked up the tale. "Yes, Uncle Peter. Did you hear about my flying accident a few days ago?"

A wry smile twisted the older man's lips. "I vaguely recall your mother threatening to ground you until you were thirty."

Sebastian flushed and tried a weak grin. "Well yeah, I was pretty stupid, I know. But the thing is, Harrison Black found me and we believe the ritual caused him to help me when I was injured. That led us to wonder what else using my blood meant."

"And what does that have to do with a Floo call to me?"

Holly turned her largest eyes on Peter. "We wanted to borrow your copy of the Marauder's Map for a few minutes, Uncle Peter. We think there might be more to Harrison Black than he's revealed."

Peter allowed his expression to turn cold. "You were already part of an illegal ritual to kidnap Mr. Black here from another world. What in Merlin's name gives you the right to further invade his privacy?"

Holly and Sebastian glanced quickly at each other with the icy comment. They certainly hadn't expected that. "Well, we think he might be more than Harrison Black," Sebastian offered. "He told me to call him Harry. We think using my blood may have summoned a living Harry Potter!"

"I repeat, what gives you the right to invade the man's privacy just for your own curiosity?"

"No...but...he could be our brother!" Holly cried.

Peter's face softened. "No Holly. Your brother was murdered years ago. We lost him and Remus Lupin. This man was abducted from another world. If he is related to the Potters, then surely it's up to him to make the decision to reveal it? Or don't you think he's suffered enough?" He frowned at the two as if considering their motives. "Tell me, why are you trying to force him into a confrontation that he doesn't need or want for your own morbid curiosity?"

The twins looked at each other and then back at Peter. "We thought we had a right to know if he was our older brother..." Holly tried.

"Your brother is dead. This is another man entirely, even if he somehow bears a name other than Black. Let it go you two. You are putting yourselves before others once again. I thought you had learned a lesson when you kidnapped an innocent man, but apparently I was wrong."

"OK, Uncle Peter. We'll back down," Sebastian said reluctantly. "However, our friend Hermione isn't the type to give up when she's given a puzzle. She doesn't back down until it's solved."

"Perhaps you should remind your friend that just because she wants to know something, it doesn't entitle her to the information. There is such a concept as privacy." He gave a mental flinch even as he narrowed his eyes at the twins. He hadn't given a thought to Harry's privacy himself when he used the Marauder's Map to determine his

true name. "Does your friend think that Professors McGonagall and Dumbledore will just accept a student violating the privacy of a staff member?"

"Uh...no. Thank you for the advice, Uncle Peter. We better go before curfew is up." They withdrew from the Floo and hurried back to the Gryffindor dorms to warn Hermione of possible repercussions, leaving Peter to sigh with both relief and remorse.

Harry sighed heavily at the parchments in front of him. With the students' help – well, with Hermione Granger's help, the review of Lord Slytherin's voting record was now complete. The votes were now categorized into a variety of topics, from those that guaranteed preferential treatment to Purebloods, to intra-border British commerce and taxes, to international treaties and tariffs.

Harry's first review seemed to prove that that Slytherin primarily voted along pureblood lines, ensuring that muggleborns and other species were continually restricted. However, he was now on his fourth review of the voting record and the words in his own notes were beginning to swim as his head pounded.

After the second review, Salazar had him document the results of other central members of the Wizengamot, both those that held traditional views and those that were more liberal. He had been sent back to the Daily Oracle archives to look for public statements about key votes.

When asked for his opinion of a proposal that only purebloods could own businesses or at least the majority share of a business, Slytherin was quoted as saying "I don't agree with forcing ancient families into becoming shopkeepers." His opposition swayed the vote against the measure.

As Harry researched the votes more closely, he discovered that Lestrage seemed to be a key ally, as the two frequently presented proposals together that were geared towards international treaties and commerce. On occasion, he supported pureblood measures proposed by three others; Rowle, Nott and Rosier.

Harry sighed again and turned towards the portrait above the fireplace. "Salazar, as much as I want to say that Riddle voted to

suppress others and support only the purebloods, I don't think that's actually true."

"And what leads you into that opinion," asked the portrait.

"He had the key vote in several measures that would have benefitted only the purebloods," Harry admitted. "It's confusing, because he does support many pureblood measures, but they don't necessarily restrict anyone else's rights, they uphold pureblood rights."

"Perhaps it's the phrasing that you are using that is causing your confusion," Salazar responded. At Harry's frown, he continued, "From what you have told me, my descendent is supporting traditional values; the Old Ways and Old Family values. In my estimation, he appears to be more of a neutral traditionalist than a Blood Purist."

"Huh," Harry grunted. He reviewed the voting records again. Reluctantly he said, "There's nothing wrong with being a traditionalist, is there?" At Salazar's arched eyebrow he added, "I mean it's not illegal or anything. He's just...really conservative, I guess."

He threw himself into the chair before the fireplace and rubbed his eyes tiredly. "If Riddle isn't behind the measures to restrict muggleborns or behind the escalating violence, then who is?"

"That my young friend, is the question. Perhaps you should query the man himself for his opinion?" He smirked as Harry groaned and dropped his head into his hands.

The five witches and wizards stopped their chanting as the portal collapsed yet again around the six figure standing in the center of the design on the floor. The participants and those watching groaned in frustration. Three times they had tried the ritual and three times they had failed.

A brown-haired young woman staggered away from the pentagram and collapsed into a chair, accepting the Pepper-Up potion handed to her, and downed it quickly. "Is everyone ready to try again tomorrow," she asked tiredly.

Assorted murmurs of agreement met her question. "It's my turn to be the focus," said one of the tired wizards. "We'll need someone to take my point in the pentagram." A tall red-head immediately said, "I'll do that."

Hermione nodded firmly. "We'll try again tomorrow then."

OoOoOoOo

Chapter 16 – An Unexpected Intruder

Following several days and increasingly sarcastic remarks from Salazar about being afraid to write a letter, Harry finally sat down to write a note to Tom Riddle. After innumerable etiquette lessons with Salazar, he didn't even ask for advice before beginning the missive.

Dear Lord Slytherin,

Thank you for your gracious hospitality during my recent visit. My companion Salazar was also pleased with your welcome and the intellectual conversation, something he frequently finds lacking in me.

We also both appreciated you sharing your perspective regarding muggleborns and half-bloods within today's wizarding society. Based on your comments and voting record, the rumors being spread that you might know more about the escalating violence towards that part of our society seems to be deliberately misleading.

Would you recommend that I be wary of any people in particular as I prepare for the future?

Yours sincerely,

Harrison Black

Salazar inclined his head and said approvingly, "We will turn you into a properly educated wizard yet" when Harry read the note to him. "A tad blunt about asking who he thinks the true culprit is, but if it were more subtle, he would know the wording came from me."

Harry rolled his eyes at the portrait. "I never thought I would have to play politics and dance around with words so much," grumbled the teen. "And I can't believe that some people actually enjoy it!"

"Think of it as a challenge, a competition to be won," suggested Salazar. "You enjoyed competing in Quidditch, did you not?" At Harry's puzzled nod, the portrait continued, "What was the goal of the competition?"

Harry frowned at his mentor. "To win, of course."

"To win at any cost?" asked the portrait.

"Of course not!" Harry exclaimed indignantly. "Cheating wouldn't prove that you were the best team!"

"Ah, so it was the goal of winning to prove you were the best at the competition then," Salazar prodded.

"Well, yeah," the young man snorted as if to say "obviously!"

"And that is the goal of politics and the maneuvering and dancing as you call it. To win the competition; to strive to be the best that you can be as you work to accomplish your political goals."

Harry opened his mouth to protest and then closed it again. "Hmm," he hummed quietly. "Perhaps you're right, Sal."

"Do not refer to me by that ridiculous appellation," Salazar responded peevishly.

Harry merely grinned and summoned Hedwig to take his letter to Tom Riddle, Lord Slytherin.

Harry!" The loud call caused the teen to turn around and raise an eyebrow at Sirius Black. "Yes, Professor?" he said respectfully.

Sirius looked at the curious students watching them in the hall and a slight flush appeared on his cheeks for shouting in the hallway. The older man half-shrugged and smiled winningly at the students before sending them on their way with an obvious shoo'ing motion.

"I haven't seen you for a few days, and wanted to make sure I hadn't done something to cause you to avoid me," Sirius admitted once they were alone in the corridor.

The DADA professor felt better immediately at the genuine expression of surprise that crossed the dark-haired teen's face. "No," he said at once. "I have a lot going on at the moment between coaching and auditing the NEWT level classes and some personal projects. I haven't been avoiding you deliberately."

"Ah," Sirius responded with a teasing smile, "then I just didn't factor into your considerations at all." He affected a dramatic pose, one hand on his forehead and the other on his heart. "I'm hurt, distraught even! To not even be worthy of a single thought during your busy day." He wavered on his feet as if about to faint.

"I won't catch you if you faint," warned Harry, unable to restrain a grin at Sirius' performance.

"And he shatters me yet again!" moaned Sirius piteously. "Well, there's only one thing for it. You'll have to join me for dinner tonight." He dropped the theatrics and smiled at the younger man. "What do you say? We'll avoid the Great Hall and have the house elves bring something to my quarters."

"That sounds good to me," Harry responded with a smile. He would enjoy a few hours with Sirius. While not his godfather, the man was amusing and spending time with him warmed a cold and empty place in his chest.

"I might even be able to convince my baby brother to join us. He just returned from a several month tour of the continent, some business, some politics, but knowing him, mostly pleasure. How about seven o'clock?"

"I'll be there," promised Harry. "By the way, aren't you late for your DADA class?"

Sirius checked the time and swore loudly. "See you at seven," he said over his shoulder as he took off at a run towards his classroom, hoping it hadn't been destroyed by the unsupervised students. Harry grinned broadly and headed back to his quarters, as he had a free period this hour.

A few minutes before seven o'clock, Harry chuckled at the new painting guarding Sirius Black's private chambers and wondered how long it would be before Minerva McGonagall or another female professor objected. The large painting was set in an ancient bath. In the foreground, two women were in the pool and playfully splashing one another. Beyond them, other women were gathered on benches in various stages of dress.

"Excuse me," he said in an attempt to get one of the ladies attentions. Unfortunately, it was the two nude women in the bath that noticed him first. They each sunk down into the water leaving only their necks and heads exposed, but considering the clarity of the water, it did nothing to hide their attributes. "Would someone let Mr. Black know that...Mr. Black...is here?" He shook his head mentally at how that sounded.

Within moments the portrait swung open and Harry stepped into the quarters of his pseudo-godfather.

"Come in, Harry!" Sirius called from the other room. He came out of the bed chamber, still putting on a casual robe over his trousers and shirt. "Have a seat and make yourself at home. I had to stay late putting my classroom back together after a few incidents earlier today, so am running a few minutes late myself," the older man rambled as he took a seat across from the younger man. "I did owl Regulus and invited him to join us. I want to see his face when I introduce you as Harrison Black."

Harry's lips twitched as he tried to hide a smirk. "You mean you want to lead him to believe that you're introducing your illegitimate son," he responded knowingly.

"Exactly!" Sirius replied with an unrepentant grin. "You'll play along, won't you?"

Before Harry could respond, the fireplace flames turned green and with a whoosh, a figure stepped gracefully through the flames and into the room.

"Reg!" shouted Sirius happily as he bounded over to his younger brother and hugged him with enthusiasm. "I'm so glad you could make it. I hope you enjoyed your Grand Tour and didn't break too many hearts." He wagged his eyebrows at his younger brother, who rolled his own eyes.

Harry immediately noticed that Regulus Black displayed a striking resemblance to Sirius, bearing the same black hair and haughty good looks; although he was a bit smaller with a leaner build than his older brother.

"Will you never grow up, Sirius," he said severely. "I was working." Then with the merest hint of a smile he added "most of the time."

A bark of laughter from Sirius answered his brother, and he turned him with an arm around his shoulders towards his guest, who stood politely. "Regulus, I want you to meet a special young man, Harrison Black. Harry, this is my younger brother Regulus."

"How do you do, Mr. Black," Harry asked politely. "Sirius has spoken of you quite fondly."

"A pleasure," Regulus said barely touching the young man's hand before dropping it. "Are you from a cadet branch of the Black family? I don't recall a Harrison Black."

"Oh, I don't think you would know me, sir," Harry said with a smile towards Sirius. "I grew up in Canada."

"But if you had been here for the last few months, you would have heard of him," Sirius said with evident pride. "He was heralded in the Daily Oracle as 'the hero of Diagon Alley'."

Harry blushed and said warningly, "Sirius..."

"And he parlayed that into an invitation to the Malfoy Ball and tea with Slytherin," Sirius continued with a grin at Harry. "There's no need to be embarrassed, Harrison. You've made great strides in the short time you've been here." He pushed his younger brother towards a seat, and Harry seated himself after Regulus sat down. Harry tried to smile innocently as the older man inspected him with speculative grey eyes.

"Being invited to both the Minister's and Lord Slytherin's homes is quite an accomplishment for a young man. Were you sorted into Slytherin House at Hogwarts?"

"I was home-schooled in Canada, so never had the pleasure of a Hogwarts education," Harry replied easily, taking the glass of Butterbeer from Sirius. Their host gave his younger brother a glass of what must have been a favorite wine, as the man sipped it with a pleased smile.

"He was invited to be an assistant Quidditch coach as he prepares for his NEWTs," added Sirius, giving Harry a proud smile. The teen had to avoid laughing at the sheer number of proud looks the older man was giving him; no doubt causing his younger brother to gain just impression Sirius wanted him to have.

Sirius kept Regulus talking about his overseas trip until dinner was served, being sure to bring Harry into the conversation regularly.

A first course of steaming soup appeared on the dining room table and Sirius said, "Come on, my boy," to Harry before gesturing to Regulus as well. Harry didn't know whether it was the tone or an expression on the older man's face, but Regulus stopped mid-step and stared at his brother with dawning shock on his face.

"You...you...incorrigible reprobate!" he ground out. "This was one of your pranks!" At Sirius' bark of laughter and slap on his shoulder, the younger man shook his head. "I should have known. Apparently my time among truly cultured wizards on the Continent lessened my skills at identifying one of your reprehensible hoaxes. I had almost made up my mind to track down the old Family tapestry to see if there was progeny under your name." He turned to Harry and demanded, "And what is your real name, young man?"

"Actually, it is Harrison Black, but I should add that Black is a common name among the Muggle community," he replied cheerfully, keeping to the history he had invented.

"You are a Muggleborn then?" asked Regulus as he took a spoonful of soup. Harry noted that his face was carefully neutral.

"Adopted actually, so I don't know my history." Admitting that to the pureblood caused a barely discernable but shudder in the other man. "However, the rumors have been rampant among the students in the school, which I think prompted Sirius to try his prank."

"And it was worthwhile. Reg, you should have seen your face! You were trying so hard to keep it dispassionate, but your eyes were horrified that I was all but acknowledging a love child."

Regulus ignored his brother and turned his attention to the young man. "What do you do when you are not helping my irredeemable brother and visiting with Ministers and Lords, Mr. Black?"

"With three Mr. Blacks at the table, I think you should call me Harry," the teen replied with a smile. "And I actually am the Assistant Quidditch Coach. I never took my NEWTs, so I'm also auditing some NEWT level classes before taking them."

They enjoyed the remainder of the soup, and the next course was served. Over herb and salt crusted lamb chops with a tawny port sauce, Regulus asked, "Tell me, Harry, what caused the acclaim of the Daily Oracle that drew so much attention to you?" He couldn't fail to notice the slight flush and embarrassment on the younger man's face.

"Some vandals attempted to destroy the merchandise of a shop I was in, and I stepped in to stop them. When Aurors arrived on the scene, I was mistaken for one of the vandals and banished through a window. The Minister invited me to his Ball as an apology, I believe. I met Lord Slytherin there, and he invited me to tea shortly after that. I believe that used up my twenty minutes of fame."

At the wizard's confused look, Harry added, "I was interesting immediately after the event, but that faded rather quickly."

Regulus nodded in understanding and then asked, "What did you think of our esteemed Minister?"

Harry smiled pleasantly and replied, "He was a most genial host. His lovely wife is an excellent dancer, able to hide my clumsiness with her gracefulness." Salazar's conversation lessons were paying off, he realized with an internal chuckle.

"Indeed, she is both lovely and graceful. Lucius is fortunate to have her. She is the perfect politician's wife," Regulus agreed.

"Our cousin as well," added Sirius. "I liked her when we were growing up. Always thought she was too good for Malfoy."

"Come now, Sirius," his younger brother admonished. "Narcissa has never expressed any reservation with the marriage."

"No, she hasn't," grumbled Sirius. "But he's just so..smarmy!" His voice dripped with condescension, causing Harry to bite back a laugh.

Regulus shook his head at his brother and seemed to just barely restrain himself from rolling his eyes. "How did you find our Lord Slytherin," he continued.

Harry chewed a bite of his lamb chops as he considered his answer. "He seems to be the very epitome of a well-bred and well-educated wizard, as well as a consummate politician."

"He is that," agreed Regulus. "We have been both allies and opponents on different legislation. One should always confirm his statements and then still research more, as he is very cunning in his comments and approach."

"I've heard rumors about him as well," Harry admitted. "But gossip can be started by anyone for any reason, so I try not to give it too much credence." The Daily Prophet in his world made sure he never trusted anything printed in that rag.

"Good point," Sirius grinned. "If half the rumors about me were true, I would have a dozen concubines and enough children to populate a small town!"

"Wishful thinking," responded Harry. The unexpected response caused Sirius to bark out in laughter while Regulus attempted to hide a snort.

As the last bite of the lamb chops disappeared, those dishes disappeared and were replaced by a light Crème Brûlée. "I applaud your stance on gossip," Regulus said as he finished his dessert. "But I would also advise you to be wary of Lord Slytherin. While he is charming and a fine dinner companion who has somehow outmaneuvered all of the match-making mothers in Britain, he is also cunning, ambitious, wealthy and likely has motives the rest of us have yet to discern."

"I will gladly take that advice," Harry replied with a bland smile.

Harry recalled Regulus Black's words as he stepped into The Fat Duck and ran a hand over his dress robe. He looked every bit the part of a young aristocrat according to Salazar, but was still unable to control his nervousness at meeting Lord Slytherin alone.

Harry had held up Slytherin's response to his note and read it out to Salazar several days ago. It contained an invitation to dinner 'to further discuss his queries'. "Interesting," commented Salazar. "Dinner in a public setting ensures that you are on neutral ground, giving neither of you an advantage."

"Unless he owns the restaurant," replied Harry suspiciously.

"I will make a Slytherin out of you yet," Salazar smirked proudly.

Harry now stood in the restaurant entrance hall trying to convince himself that another verbal dance with Tom Riddle was a good idea. He took a deep breath before he descended the grand staircase to the main dining room. He was immediately approached the Maitre D', a small impeccably dressed man. "My name is Harrison Black and..." he began.

"Bien sûr, Monsieur Black, it is a pleasure to see you again. Lord Slytherin was seated only minutes ago. This way, s'il vous plaît." The Maitre D' led him towards a corner table that looked out at the other diners, but maintained an air of intimacy around it.

The handsome aristocrat inclined his head as Harry approached and waited for the young man to be seated in the chair the Maitre D' held for him. "Thank you, Bernard," he said quietly to the other man, who bowed slightly and faded away.

"Welcome, Mr. Black. I hope you do not mind, but I ordered the Chef's Choice for us both, a pan-seared chicken breast with mushrooms and asparagus."

"That sounds delicious," Harry admitted with a smile. He accepted the glass of white wine from the previously unseen waiter.

Slytherin examined the well-dressed young man and said, "You had questions that you were not certain how to phrase in your note to me."

"Well, yes sir," Harry confessed. "It appears as if someone or a group are spreading rumors or placing misinformation that you are responsible for the escalation of violence towards muggleborns and half-bloods. Being a newcomer to the area, I wondered who you thought was responsible?"

Slytherin took a sip of his wine before saying, "A good question. Tell me, do you believe that the participants in the violence risk their safety based solely on their convictions regarding Blood Purity?"

Harry blinked and thought before answering the odd question. Many of Voldemort's Death Eaters enjoyed violence and causing pain, such as Bellatrix Lestrange. Others, like Wormtail, were simply cowed by those with more power than themselves. But the people in this world? He had assumed they followed the Blood Purist philosophy, but Slytherin's question implied otherwise. He looked at the older man and said slowly, "I know that some people are willing to put themselves in jeopardy if they truly believe in their cause. I don't know enough of these events to say whether that's what is happening here, sir."

Slytherin paused as the waiter delivered a salad with caramelized walnuts and endives. "Those involved are little more than mercenaries being paid to participate in the violence. They are in the lowest echelons of the Blood Purist movement, if not outside of it."

Harry considered that. "I suppose there is no evidence where the mercenary funding is coming from?"

Slytherin raised an eyebrow at the younger man, as if to chastise Harry for questioning the man's information gathering abilities. Harry inclined his head silently in apology.

Mollified, the older man acknowledged, "From I have been able to discern, someone in the wizarding world discovered that there is a profit to be made in the Muggle world based on illegal drugs and entered that 'business pursuit' to fund their actions in the wizarding world."

Harry's eyes widened in shock. Wizards were becoming Muggle drug lords? That seemed almost unbelievable!

Slytherin continued, "My sources found evidence that they are concentrating on the London, Edinburgh and Dublin areas. They have proven to be successful as they can easily escape Muggle law enforcement confrontations through basic confounding spells and can apparate away when necessary."

The youth shook his head in amazement. "I never thought wizards would turn to Muggle crimes. Can't the DMLE help trap them?"

Slytherin half-rolled his eyes at the teen's naivety. "Their activities are not against wizarding law, Mr. Black." At Harry's stunned expression, he added, "Addictive substances are few in the magical world, as purging potions will clear the body of most substances. Therefore, the manufacturing, selling and use of said substances is not illegal in most instances."

Harry looked at the older man intently as the waiter replaced their dishes with their main course. "Perhaps someone should introduce a proposal to make it illegal to sell addictive Muggle substances to Muggles since they don't have the same options to avoid addiction?" he said slowly.

The older man inclined his head slightly. "An ally of the Chief Warlock would be best to introduce such a measure. Perhaps a man like Elphias Doge would be interested."

Harry nodded his head. "I will mention it to the Chief Warlock when I next see him. That would give the DMLE the ability to capture and prosecute wizards and witches without needing to involve Muggle law enforcement."

"It would," acknowledged Slytherin, "but I think you will find that it would be a lower priority on the DMLE's agenda. They are already at minimum staffing levels due to a lack of funding."

Still unsure of Slytherin's genuine position, Harry asked slowly, "Sir, what do you believe is the Blood Purist's actual purpose? Is there an objective beyond restricting non Purebloods from having a place in wizarding society?"

Slytherin took several bites of his meal before he responded. "I only have my observations based on what has occurred over the last decade. They have successfully limited werewolves, vampires, and non-human species from having a prominent voice in government or commerce, other than concessions made centuries ago to the goblins. Even the goblins have no say outside of the walls of their institution, except what is clearly spelled out in any treaties. There appears to be a move to force an isolationist policy on Britain. Limits on both treaties and cooperation with foreign governments has been

increasing. The attitude that anything non-British is inferior has become more prevalent, increasing the ill will among other nations. We are losing allies as we slowly become more isolated."

Harry tried to absorb that information, as it wasn't at all what he expected the older man to say. "Doesn't that mean that these policies are supported at the highest levels of the Ministry? Is Malfoy himself involved?"

Slytherin offered the younger man a half smile. "While the Minister would be an advantageous role to secure, one should not overlook minor roles in the Ministry that could have significant impacts, beyond international isolation."

"Minor roles?" Harry tried to think of what the other man meant. As different ideas occurred to him, he swallowed heavily. "Like the Education department? They could make sure students only learn what they want them to learn and could basically dumb down the entire population. Or perhaps they could get to the people in control of the Floo system? They could shut it down, causing chaos. They might even find a way to seize strategic people out of the system entirely."

"Well reasoned," the older man said.

Harry tried to hide his concern behind the same dispassionate expression the other man wore, but didn't think he was nearly as successful. "Doesn't that mean that we should be prepared to act if they act? There should be emergency plans in place."

"What would you recommend, Mr. Black," the older man responded.

Harry tried to think carefully before responding. "Maybe a way to force Britain to maintain international educational standards, so that we don't fall behind the rest of the world. Or if the Floo actually became compromised, a way to communicate that or even a method to shut the network down entirely..." Merlin, he hated politics!

"Your proposals have merit," Slytherin said approvingly.

"We need to get spies into their organization. I thought Dumbledore had a highly placed one based on...my previous experiences...but

I'm not sure he does or if he does, I'm not sure they are highly placed."

"I believe that Albus has attempted to infiltrate the organization, but only has his agents in the lower echelons as of yet."

"And you?" Harry asked boldly. "Do you have someone placed in the higher echelons?"

Slytherin smirked at the younger man. "I have been aware of these maneuvers for some time and began working on it several years ago. However, my agents are not in the top tiers as of yet, so cannot identify who the leaders are."

Harry couldn't help saying, "Why do I get the impression that you have agents everywhere?"

The older man smirked again, "I am a Slytherin in more ways than one, Mr. Black. It is always prudent to try to find friends and associates in every organization and walk of life."

Harry met the other man's eyes curiously. "Which is how you found out about me?"

Slytherin smiled, but made no response.

After the waiter presented Grand Marnier soufflés for their dessert, the older man asked, "How long have you been a Parselmouth, Mr. Black?"

Harry considered his response, and then mentally shrugged, not seeing how the truth would harm anything. "As long as I can remember," he admitted.

"Even if you don't want me to perform a hereditary test, I am surprised that Salazar Slytherin hasn't suggested it. Surely he would want to know if his protégé was a descendent."

Harry smirked briefly. "He hasn't suggested it."

A hint of a frown crossed Slytherin's face before he composed it back to his normal neutral expression. Harry had to sip from his water glass to hide his smirk.

"It's so hard trying to decide whether Tom Riddle is actually being honest or not," Harry complained to Salazar after he finished recounting the evening. "He gave me an awful lot of information...for free. I didn't give him anything in return."

"Nothing?" queried Salazar with an upturn of his lips.

Harry frowned at the portrait. What had he given Riddle? "All I did was go to dinner at a restaurant and listen to what he had to say."

"In a public restaurant, where anyone could see you having a one-on-one with him," added the portrait casually. "And you showed that you could extrapolate what areas of the Ministry could sabotage the general public, showing your intelligence. You also offered counter measures, showing your political leanings. And you believe he received nothing from the evening?"

Harry stared at the portrait with a gaping mouth and wide eyes. "Bloody hell," he whispered. "He learned an awful lot about me, without me ever realizing it. I will never survive politics!"

At Salazar's amused expression he retorted, "Well? What did you learn from his comments? Can he be trusted? Is he being honest?"

To Harry's irritation, the humor grew on the portrait's face. "He can be trusted in situations where he gains something from the outcome or the alliance. He will be honest when it will be to his advantage."

"ARGH! And I still don't know if he's spinning a wild tale or whether there's an isolationist organization trying to undermine the British wizarding society!"

A quill scratched effortlessly across parchment in the sunlight study where Lily Potter was writing a paper on a new Charm she and Filius Flitwick had developed that was a combination of a ward and Fidelius charm. Abruptly, she felt an alarm screech against her magical core, alerting her that the wards on the manor had been breached. She withdrew her wand and prepared to defend herself. Almost instantly, James Potter apparated into the house, his wand drawn and a curse on his lips. He relaxed marginally when he saw his wife healthy and unharmed, even as she drew her own sigh of

relief at seeing her husband. The ward alarm was still shrieking for attention, and with a brief incantation, James silenced it.

"The basement," he muttered to his wife, who nodded. The wards had given her the intruder's location as well. They proceeded cautiously to the basement, with James taking point.

No intruder was found in the first several rooms, and their nerves were stretched thin when they reached one large storage room. A silent "Lumos" by James brightened the area. To his surprise, a vaguely familiar scene was displayed before him. An unconscious figure lay face-down on the storage room floor; the same room used by the children to summon Harrison Black to their world. Fortunately this figure didn't appear to be a bloody mess.

James slowly approached the body while Lily stood across the room ready to stun and incarcerate the intruder. He rolled the figure over and professionally noted mentally that it was an older graying light-skinned male with a scarred face and a slender build. Behind him, he heard Lily gasp.

"James..." she exclaimed in apparent shock, and then seemed unable to say more.

James stayed focused on the trespasser. He patted down the man and found an arm holster containing an ash wand, approximately eleven and a half inches he mentally recorded for his report. The wand seemed dimly familiar to him and he stared at it for a few moments before shaking his head and tucking it away. He continued to search the man and found a small box on a chain around his neck, but was unable to remove it. He quickly checked other pockets and patted the man's legs looking for a second wand or other weapon. Finally he stood and took a step back from the unconscious figure. Only then did he take his eyes away to glance at Lily.

His wife was staring at the unconscious man with an open mouth, her eyes wide with shock. "Lily?" he asked quietly, his concern for her condition evident.

Her green eyes snapped to him and she shook her head in disbelief. "James, I can't believe you don't recognize him."

Recognize him? James looked again at the figure's face and slowly his own eyes widened and he staggered a step before regaining his balance. "Merlin's saggy balls" he swore loudly. "Moony?" Only his wife's stunned amazement kept her from smacking him for his language.

The two stared at the unconscious figure for several more moments, as their minds raced, trying to make sense of what their eyes were telling them. "Do you...do you think he's from Harrison Black's world?" asked Lily softly.

"I don't know. He's an intruder and could be anything. Someone under Polyjuice, or a glamour, hoping to get revenge on the Auror that arrested him, maybe."

He looked at Lily as she cast several diagnostic spells at the unconscious man. "He's magically exhausted, but that could be from breaking the wards. I don't see any other injuries." She hesitated for a moment and then cast a spell to reveal lycanthropy. The man glowed red for a few moments. "Positive. He's a werewolf."

"This is insane," James muttered. "I should just restrain him and bring him to a holding cell at the Ministry."

"But what if he is Remus? One that lived? He could be here looking for young Black," objected Lily.

The Auror in him argued for several minutes, but the Marauder finally acquiesced to his wife's appeals and the unconscious figure that so resembled his deceased friend was levitated up the stairs and installed in a guest bed room. As a precaution, he cast a sticking hex, ensuring the man couldn't leave the bed, and cast a ward around the bed, window and doors that would prevent him from escaping, as well as alert them when he regained consciousness.

Both of them stayed in the room for several hours, staring at what appeared to be an older version of the friend that gave his life to try to save their son so many years ago. However, the man remained unconscious and unmoving. Lily cast several diagnostic charms over the course of the evening and each showed the man was recovering normally from the severe magical exhaustion. They finally sought

their own beds, but spend the night in very restless sleep with nightmares they had hoped they wouldn't see again.

Remus slowly clawed his way back to consciousness. He heard footsteps approaching and cracked his eyes to take in that he was in a comfortable bed in what appeared to be someone's bed room. Memories of the ritual suddenly flooded his mind and his heart began to race. Had he made it?

The door opened to his left and he turned his head and drew in his breath sharply as the two figures entered the room, a slender red-headed woman with brilliant green eyes and a dark-haired man wearing glasses. Spots began to dance before his eyes and he tried to control his breathing as he stared almost hungrily at the man who was inspecting him.

"I gather you recognize us," James said cautiously.

Remus could have wept at the sound of the familiar voice. "You look like old friends of mine," he softly admitted.

"Did your friends have names?"

Remus swallowed hard. Should he admit it? "James and Lily Potter," he finally wheezed, his eyes drinking in the features of his old friend. He saw that Lily had a tremulous smile on her lips at that admission.

"And your name?" continued James, trying hard and not certain that he was succeeding in keeping a neutral tone.

"I'm Remus John Lupin." He paused and then decided that in for a knut, in for a galleon. "Also known as Moony to my closest friends."

A sob drew his attention to Lily, who had tears streaming down her face. One hand stretched towards the bed. "Remus..." she began before her voice cracked.

"How is this possible," muttered James. "Remus died almost twenty years ago with our son."

Remus' amber eyes widened in shock and then his face assumed an expression of acknowledgement. "Harry? Harry died?" He looked at James and then at Lily. "I'm so sorry," he whispered somberly.

"Our Remus was babysitting and died protecting him. The official report was that it was a break-in, but we never caught the thieves."

Remus felt a moment of relief at the telling words, as he repeated, "Our Remus? So you're aware of parallel worlds?"

"It's a phenomenon we recently became aware of," James admitted. "Why are you here?" he continued. "Why now?"

"A young man from our world is missing. We found traces of an enormous magical disturbance where he was last located and think he might have wound up here. I'm here looking for him."

"Harrison Black," whispered Lily softly even as James asked, "What is his name?" However, Remus' enhanced werewolf hearing heard Lily's whisper.

"I don't know what name he would have given if he thought he had been taken against his will," replied Remus quietly. "Probably Black. Have you seen him? Dark haired young man, slender, green eyes? He might have been seriously injured." His voice choked with emotion as he added, "Please, I just need to know that he's alive."

Lily and James glanced at one another.

Remus tries to shift in the bed and realized he was bound there. "You're keeping me restrained?"

James looked at this version of Remus and raised an eyebrow. "When an intruder breaches our wards and appears uninvited in our home, a mild restraint is not an unreasonable response."

Remus collapsed back on the bed. "Fine. Just tell me whether the young man is all right."

Lily answered, her brief glare silencing her husband when he opened his mouth to protest. "He was injured, but has recovered."

Remus relaxed at her words. His cub was alive! He closed his eyes briefly as he tried to control his emotions and unbidden, images of the last few months replayed in his mind.

Voldemort's death was revealed when a variety of wizards and a few witches around the wizarding world collapsed and fell unconscious; many died. Each was found to bear the Dark Mark.

Voldemort's strong hold was discovered when the Unspeakables reported that a magical incursion of significant magnitude indicated that a trans-dimensional portal had been opened in that location. Voldemort's decaying body was found in a cell under the house. A great deal of dried blood was found throughout the room that didn't match the body. The Order members in the DMLE were able to report that spell work proved that the blood still retained remnants of Harry Potter's magical signature.

They were able to gather all of the dried blood that came from Harry and with Hermione Granger in the lead, they began to research how to find out where the portal originated. They thought they found it and with the participation of all of the surviving Weasleys, Neville, Luna, Remus, Tonks and Hermione, they tried to open a portal to pull him back using his dried blood, but couldn't seem to establish a link to him.

Without knowing the ritual or components used to summon him, Hermione theorized that a return portal had to be opened from his side, or that he had to actively participate in the ritual. She speculated that they might need to send someone to him to let him know they were trying to reach him, learn about the ritual used to summon him, and identify methods on how to return.

In testament to their love for Harry, they each argued that they should be the one to go through to the other world, and finally drew lots. Neville was first to make the attempt, but while the portal began to form, it collapsed the moment he tried to access it. They tried to send Luna next, but while she reported that she could see a hospital bed with herself lying in it, she couldn't go through. They surmised that the person couldn't exist twice in the same dimension, and that the counterpart would have to not exist or be deceased for them to get through. They next tried with Arthur Weasley, but the portal collapsed without him seeing anything as soon as he tried to access it. Remus made the next attempt and Bill Weasley took his spot on the pentagram.

He opened his eyes and stared at the counterparts of two of his oldest and dearest friends. Did Harry know about them? A thought

struck him and he tried not to cry out. Was Sirius alive here as well? He felt like his heart would explode and he blinked back the tears. "What is the next step," he asked quietly. "Where is he? Can I see him?"

Lily couldn't help herself; she had to know. "Remus...did Harry...did he live in your world or was he killed there too?"

James froze at the question, unable to breathe while he waited for Remus to respond.

OoOoOoOo

Chapter 17 – We'll Get You Home Again

Lily couldn't help herself; she had to know. "Remus...did Harry...did he live in your world or was he killed there too?"

James froze at the question, unable to breathe while he waited for Remus to respond.

The raw emotion in Lily's voice prompted Remus to open his mouth to assure her that Harry had survived in his world, but he abruptly closed his mouth before he responded. He looked at the replicas of his old friends and then mentally shook his head.

"I'm sorry," he said with sincere remorse, "but until I see the young man taken from my world and hear from his own lips that he is well, and understand why he was forcibly taken from my world, it doesn't make sense for me to say anything." He had to remind himself to call Harry his friend rather than his cub as was his habit, lest he reveal anything to these Potter impersonators. "I don't know this world and as much as you look like my beloved friends, I don't know you; for all I know, you killed my friend the moment he appeared."

Lily's eyes widened in shock even as James' eyes narrowed in outrage. "I will have you know that I am a Senior Auror," he began angrily, only to have Lily silence him with a soft hand on his arm.

"James, he's right," she said softly. "Think of it from his perspective. He's gone through an extreme ritual to search for someone who was taken from him, and all he knows is that we restrained him to that bed. He has no reason to trust us yet."

"He broke into our home," objected James heatedly.

"The portal was set to open at the same location where our friend wound up" Remus said quietly. "If I intruded into your home, I apologize, but that also means that it was your home that served as the focus for the magic that abducted my friend." He looked at James and added, "As a Senior Auror, surely you would be hesitant to trust those that may have kidnapped a dear friend for unknown reasons?"

James glared the werewolf and then turned and his heavy footsteps just barely escaped from being considered stomping. Lily muffled a

laugh and with a wave of her wand, released Remus from his constraints. "James will come around, Remus," she said with a soft smile. "He struggles when he can't control events and worries about the family's safety." She nodded towards the neatly folded and obviously recently cleaned stack of clothing on the dresser. "It's almost sunrise, so we may as well start the day properly. The bathroom is across the hall. Why don't you shower and dress and then come down. I'll have breakfast ready by then and James should have calmed down as well."

Remus couldn't help but chuckle at the reminder of how his world's James usually needed some quiet time to adjust to changes. "Thank you, Lily. Hopefully, you'll be able to share the news about my friend then as well."

He carefully picked up the clothing and exited the room with as much dignity as he could while wearing pajama pants that wanted to fall off his narrow hips. A hot shower helped relieve the rest of his sore muscles. He dressed carefully and walked quietly down the stairs, following his sensitive nose to the kitchen.

As he approached the door, he heard James' voice saying somewhat petulantly, "Fine, you win Lily. We'll let him write a letter to young Black, but at the same time, I'm going to alert Albus."

"That's fine, James," Lily's voice responded agreeably. "Since young Mr. Black is the Assistant Quidditch Coach, Albus has the right to know if a situation could impact a member of his staff."

Remus grinned broadly hearing that the young man he assumed to be his cub was an Assistant Quidditch Coach, presumably at Hogwarts since the only Albus he knew was Albus Dumbledore. That also implied that Harry was reasonably healthy to take on that role, and that helped to soothe the wolf in him.

Both James and Lily looked up as he entered; Lily with a warm smile and James with a curt nod of his head. "After breakfast, why don't you write a letter to Mr. Black," suggested Lily. "He was injured when he arrived and was healed at Hogwarts. After that, he accepted the role of Quidditch coach with Rolanda Hooch."

Although Remus wanted to apparate directly to Hogsmeade instead of writing, Lily continued as if understanding his thoughts, "He

should have some advance warning of your presence, don't you think? It might be rather shocking for him to see and accept you otherwise."

Remus sighed in mild frustration, but nodded in agreement. After the meal was complete, he sat with a quill and parchment, trying to figure out what to reveal and what to keep secret, since he wasn't sure the mail would be secure. Even so, he cast a privacy charm on it so that anyone other than Harry would see only nonsense. Finally, he dipped the quill in the ink and began to write.

Harry was finishing breakfast in the Great Hall when a large eagle owl landed in front of Albus and allowed him to untie a rolled parchment. The owl then immediately launched itself across the table towards Harry, and offered him the same leg that still had a parchment tied. Harry raised an eyebrow, but untied the missive and fed the owl a piece of bacon from his plate.

He turned the parchment over and felt his throat tighten as he recognized the handwriting. With shaking hands, he unrolled the letter.

Harrison Black,

After V's defeat, we found his retreat and where you had been kept. A rather brilliant young witch of your acquaintance was able to discover that a portal had been opened and you were pulled through it. Needless to say, that brilliant young witch didn't rest until she discovered a method of re-creating the portal with the help of your friends and family. I was able to come through last night, and am currently the guest of James and Lily Potter.

To confirm who I am, we first met on the Hogwarts Express and I had to remind you several times to eat your chocolate.

As soon as I have your permission, I will apparate to Hogsmeade and come see you at Hogwarts.

Love,

Moony

Harry's hands were shaking by the time he finished reading the letter and the Potions Master who was sitting next to him looked at the young man with some concern. He quietly removed a calming draught from his robes and offered it to the teen.

Harry recognized the potion being offered and immediately gulped it down, relaxing somewhat as the shock began to subside. He felt Albus' eyes on him and looked up at the elderly wizard, who was looking at him with some concern.

"James explained the situation," the older man said quietly. "I suggest you take the morning off for your reunion." Harry nodded abstractedly and began to stand, only to have the eagle owl hoot at him demandingly.

He used the same parchment to respond, "Moony, I will be waiting at the gates. Harry". He gave the missive back to the owl, who took off immediately. Harry stood, but was stopped by a hand on his arm. He looked at it blankly and then back at Sirius Black, who was watching him with some concern.

"Is everything all right," asked the older man quietly.

Harry laughed shakily. "Ask me again in a few hours." With that, he left the Great Hall using the exit nearest the staff table to avoid the students.

An hour later, Harry was pacing in front of the Hogwarts gates wondering whether he was about to be ambushed or whether his Remus Lupin had somehow arrived from their own world. He had to force himself to breathe normally before he started to hyperventilate from the tension.

Three cracks sounded to his left and he spun with his wand outstretched and a stunning spell on his lips. He recognized James and Lily Potter, and remembered that Moony had said he was their guest. His eyes moved to the third figure and he unthinkingly restored his wand in its holster with an involuntary movement. His eyes roamed over the scarred and tired face, before he rested on the familiar amber eyes. His voice cracked as he whispered, "Moony" and with a blur, the werewolf had him in a close embrace.

Harry felt his carefully constructed walls begin to crumble as he trembled in the arms of the man who had been uncle and father figure to him, the man who had tried to replace the aching gap Sirius' loss had meant. He drew shuddering breaths, trying to control his emotions, but the last gulp of air began a keening of heart-wrenching anguish as tears began to flow down his cheeks.

Moony caught the young man before he could collapse on the ground, as the wail filled with suffering and torment saturated the morning air. The older man cast a privacy spell around the crying teen, even as he rocked him in his arms. He looked up at James and Lily, who were watching with expressions of shock at the broken figure before them.

"Do you know where his quarters are," he demanded, irritated that they just stood there and watched the collapse of his cub.

"Quarters," repeated James dumbly, transfixed by the anguished young man before them. A smack from his wife brought him back to himself, as she fiercely whispered, "He obviously needs privacy, James." The Auror realized the young man was on the verge of an emotional breakdown and pointed back towards Hogwarts. "Sirius and I visited his quarters once. I can show you the way, but don't know the password."

Remus swung the teen up into his arms and then cast a disillusionment spell over him, allowing the privacy ward to remain, so that no passerby would hear his anguished weeping. "Lead on," he demanded of James.

After several long minutes striding through empty hallways as class was in session, James stopped before guest quarters guarded by a portrait of the ancient wizard and alchemist, Hermes Trismegistus. "The young master is not within," the portrait said to the three men before him.

Remus removed the disillusionment from around Harry, who was sobbing quietly into the werewolf's shoulder. "Oh my," the portrait said, "Just a moment." He disappeared from the frame, leaving Remus frowning, his eyes darting around the halls to ensure Harry's privacy was kept. A few moments later, the portrait re-appeared and opened the door.

Remus stopped in the doorway and looked back at James and Lily. "I don't think he would appreciate witnesses to this breakdown," he said quietly. "Why don't you go see Albus?" With that, he turned and entered the guest quarters, and the portrait slammed itself shut as if in agreement with the one carrying his charge.

Remus removed the privacy ward from around the teen, and the anguished sobs could be heard again. Almost instantly, a house elf appeared with a vial in her hand. "A calming draught for the young master," she announced to Remus. He looked at her in surprise, and then blinked as she disappeared as soon as his hand closed around the vial. He broke the seal and smelled it to confirm the contents, then lifted it to Harry's lips.

"Here cub, can you drink this for me? That's a good boy. Take a little sip." His gentle voice continued to offer support and encouragement until Harry allowed the potion to slide down his throat.

As the calming draught took effect, Harry slid off the other man's lap with a blush of embarrassment, but stayed close, relaxing as the older man wrapped an arm around his shoulders.

"I...I'm sorry, Remus," he began. "I thought I would never see anyone from home again. First I thought I would die alone in Voldemort's dungeon and then I thought I would never be able to get home and see anyone again..." He hiccupped as he tried to swallow another sob that wanted to escape.

"We never stopped looking for you, Harry, not for a moment. Without any spies left among the Death Eaters, we just couldn't find you. We even had plans to kidnap members of the Inner Circle, but none of them were seen publicly after you were taken."

"Yeah, well they saw me often enough," whispered Harry. "Although Lucius, Bellatrix and Wormtail were my primary torturers, they let just about everyone have a go at me at some point. They would bring me within a heartbeat of dying and then heal me, just so they could start over again." His shudder at the memories was both visible and felt against the older man's body.

Remus tried to force the growl down, but the wolf wanted to tear someone's throat out for hurting his cub. To his surprise, the feral growl seemed to reassure the broken teen.

"Merlin, I've missed you, Moony," Harry admitted as he snuggled closer to his adopted godfather. "How did you even get here?"

"The Unspeakables tracked a huge magical incursion and discovered Voldemort's strong hold as well as his decaying body. It seems someone tore out his heart."

"Well...he was about to kill me..." Harry muttered.

"That was you? After everything that was done to you?" Remus tightened his hold on the younger man. "I suppose 'well done' isn't appropriate, but still, the entire British wizarding world is grateful." Harry shifted uncomfortably, so Remus continued. "The Unspeakables were the ones that determined a trans-dimensional portal had been opened, and your blood was found in the room as well as a very faint magical signature. There was so much blood...but because of the magical signature, we hoped and prayed that you were still alive."

"It was Hermione Granger that began to research, as the Unspeakables weren't being very helpful. They're just too used to holding their secrets to themselves. Once Hermione thought she had tracked the site where the portal originated, we began trying to recreate it."

"We?"

"The Weasleys...oh Merlin, you don't know...Ron is still alive, Harry! When he forced you to leave him alone, he fought until they were too close. Then when a Killing Curse almost hit him, he played dead. He said he had seen the staring eyes often enough to mimic them. The Death Eaters actually put a port key on him to send him to Hogsmeade, thinking it would devastate the resistance. Instead, it was a victory for us."

Harry squeezed his eyes tightly closed and one hand gripped Remus' robes tightly. "Ron...is alive?" He opened his eyes and stared at the amber eyes that never lied to him.

"He'll walk with a limp and a cane for the rest of his life, but he says the cane is useful for getting the food that's out of reach at the table."

Harry gave a half laugh and half sob upon hearing this. "He's alive. Ron is alive," he repeated. He stared at Remus again. "You promise me, Remus?"

"I swear on my life and magic that Ron Weasley was alive when I came through the portal to here," Remus vowed solemnly. He rubbed the younger man's back gently as the tears ran down his cheeks. "Once we realized that we couldn't pull you back, Ron wanted to be the first to attempt to come through, but we convinced him to heal more first."

"How did you even find me and open a portal?" sniffed Harry, trying to dry his tears.

"There was so much of your blood in the cell, cub. We made sure that all of it was taken, so that no one could use it for some immoral purpose, but then Hermione found a way to use it to find you. We used that blood to open the portal, and there was a line of people that wanted to go through to look for you. All of the Weasleys volunteered, as did Neville Longbottom, Luna Lovegood, Nymphadora Tonks, and me. We finally had to draw lots about the order we would go in. Neville Longbottom tried first, but the portal just collapsed as soon as he tried to access it. Luna Lovegood was next and at first it appeared that she was going to make it; she even reported seeing an image of herself in a hospital bed just before the portal collapsed. That was when Hermione theorized that our counterparts couldn't exist in this world for us to get through."

"Ron and Neville are alive here," Harry confirmed. "But it didn't occur to me until you mentioned Luna that I haven't seen her. Hermione is here too."

"Arthur Weasley tried next," Moony began.

"He and Molly are both alive, as are all of the Weasley children. Even Fabian and Gideon Prewett are alive here."

"Well that explains why Arthur didn't make it. I was next in line, and Bill Weasley took my place in the ritual as I was the focus."

"This world's Moony died along with baby Harry Potter back in 1981. Merlin, so much is different here, Moony, I don't even know where to start!" He pulled back and then called out, "Nebby!"

The house elf appeared holding a tea service and smiled gently at the teen. "Nebby is pleased to see the young Master looking better. Nebby is thinking that perhaps the young master would like some chamomile tea?"

Harry smiled tremulously at the elf. "Why do you always know just what I need, Nebby?"

"Nebby is a good elf, she is," the house elf replied with a sniff. "Of course Nebby be knowing what Master Black needs!"

"Thank you for taking such good care of me, Nebby," Harry replied softly.

"Young master doesn't need to be thanking Nebby for doing her job," she responded. She looked at Remus and put her hands on her hips. "You best be taking care of the young master and not making him heartsick," she said vehemently.

"I'll do my best," Remus responded gravely. "Of course, the young master doesn't always listen to his elders."

"Hrmph, Nebby already knew that." She poured each man a cup of tea and then popped out.

Harry leaned against the older man, as if unwilling to let the tactile comfort go as he sipped his tea. "I don't remember being summoned, but it was five students that did it. Hermione, Neville, Ron, and..." his eyes widened and he glanced up at Remus, "...the Potter twins."

"Potter twins!" Remus shook his head as if trying to fathom the idea of twin Potters. "The portal put me in James and Lily's basement. That's where you showed up?"

"I think so," Harry conceded, "but I was unconscious by then. I woke up in the Hogwarts Infirmary." He looked up at Remus and added, "It's not just James and Lily that are here, but Sirius and Peter as well."

A loud feral growl began when Remus heard the betrayer's name.
"Peter Pettigrew?"

"It's all different here, Remus," Harry explained. "I couldn't believe it either, but Peter isn't a Death Eater. In fact, they don't even have Death Eaters. Tom Riddle never became Lord Voldemort, instead he became officially recognized as Lord Slytherin and is active in politics. I still don't know whether he's evil or not. I've actually met him three times now. He seems to be interested in me. Oh, and there was no war in this world, and the families that died out are still alive here. Neville Longbottom's parents are well here."

"How do you know that Wormtail isn't hiding his allegiance?" snarled the werewolf.

"Well, he stood up to James and Sirius when they turned on me for being a parselmouth. Apparently, he felt calling me a dark wizard for something I wasn't responsible for was the same as maligning you." At Remus' surprised expression, he nodded. "Odd, isn't it? He's not the coward he was in our world. Apparently, the Marauders weren't allowed to become bullies, and I think our Peter was always afraid he could become one of their targets and resented them for it. In this world, Dumbledore didn't allow malicious acts under the guise of 'pranking', and Peter was stronger for it. Oh, and his Marauder name was 'Twitch' here, not Wormtail. He gave Sirius fleas when he tried to call him Wormtail."

At the half smile on the bemused werewolf's face, Harry added, "He also offered to give me his oath that he would never betray the Potters or me."

"OK, so Moony can't eat Wormtail," stated the older man a bit morosely.

"Nope. Oh, and most people don't know I'm Harry Potter. I used the name Harrison Black. But Peter figured me out and revealed it in front of Albus, Sirius and Severus. So far only they know."

"Severus? Severus Snape?"

"Yes, and he's not the same either. He's still acid-tongued, but he's not the bitter and hate-filled man our Snape became. I actually like this one."

"Interesting. I look forward to meeting him. But, you look almost exactly like James Potter. I spoke with this world's version, and you resemble him closely, even if you do have a new scar." He gently traced the long mark down the young man's face.

"Yeah, courtesy of Fenir Greyback, but at least I didn't lose the eye. And I used the Termino Agnitio spell." At Remus' raised eyebrow he added, "It keeps people from recognizing me, or associating me with anyone they know."

"Interesting, I haven't heard of that before," admitted the older man.

"Um...yeah, that's something else that happened. Voldemort had come to kill me and just before he did, I felt Hermione's medallion heat up, announcing that all the horcruxes had been destroyed. I took everything I had left in me, and punched a hole in Voldemort's chest and ripped out his heart. He was staring at me as he died...and then suddenly I was overwhelmed with knowledge – his knowledge. I got the spell from that information."

Remus rubbed the teen's back. "My poor cub. I wish I could have taken your place. I wish we could have found you sooner. No one should suffer the way you have."

"S'not your fault," Harry muttered from the general location of Remus' chest, enjoying the familiar smell of the older man and soaking up his warmth.

After several minutes, Remus asked, "So did they explain why they opened a portal and grabbed you from our world?"

Harry growled and stiffened in his the tender hug. "The bloody teenagers here over-reacted. There's no war, but there has been a slow encroachment on muggleborns and half-bloods, including some suspicious deaths. There's a Blood Purist movement, but none of the deeds can be reliably traced back to them. Neville survived a near-death experience as a baby, and this world's version of Rita Skeeter," he spat out the name venomously, "named him 'the boy-with-a-destiny' and set the expectation that he's supposed to right all of society's wrongs."

Remus shook his head in confusion. "I still don't understand. Why did they enact a ritual to snatch you?"

Harry sat up and ran his hand through his hair. "Well, they decided that Lord Slytherin was responsible for the increased violence towards non-purebloods and figured that Neville was going to be forced to face him at some point. This world's Hermione was looking for a ritual to summon a familiar to help Neville, but then discovered the ritual to summon a 'champion'. It used blood as a focus, to give the summoned hero an inclination to help the one whose blood was used. But Neville forgot the dagger, and apparently Sebastian Potter used his blood instead. And guess who was lucky enough to fit their requirements?"

"Oh Harry," Remus murmured, pulling the teen back into a tight hug.

"They never even thought it through, Remus. I came through the portal minutes from death, so they did save my life, but I had no wand, no family, no friends, no resources whatsoever...and they hadn't even thought about how to send me back!" He drew a shaky breath, trying not to give in to the tears threatening to fall. "I was all alone here with no way to get back."

"I'm here now, cub. And I brought instructions on how to re-open the portal for us to go back through. We'll need five strong magic users for the ritual, but we'll get you home again, I promise."

It took some time for Harry to work through the raging emotions that he had carefully barricaded behind steel walls in his mind. Finally, the two men exhausted the first wave of sorrow and anger. Feeling somewhat worn out, Remus waved his wand over the teapot and it began to steam again. He poured each of them a cup and then leaned back, savoring the sweet delicate taste and the warmth of the cup in his hands.

"Feeling up to a few questions," he asked the younger man. "Or should questions wait until tomorrow?"

Harry sipped his own tea and heaved a sigh. "Better to warn you now about what's going on before you get surprised," he admitted.

"OK, what did you mean when you said 'Lord Slytherin' was interested in you?" That comment was nagging at the werewolf's

protective nature, and he wanted to be aware of just what type of threat his cub was facing.

"Lord Slytherin, now that's a story. I first met him at the Malfoy's ball...oh wait, that's one thing you don't know. Guess who's Minister of Magic here?"

Remus raised an eyebrow. "Don't tell me it's Lucius Malfoy..."

"Right in one," Harry grinned. "He had a big ball and that's where I first met Riddle, now known as Lord Slytherin. A while later, I received an invitation to tea; me and a bunch of other people from every walk of life; a reporter, a lawyer, a healer, and such. And then he invited just me to his house and finally we met for dinner in a restaurant."

"But why all of those contacts? What prompted his interest?"

"Well, Salazar thinks that he learned I was summoned here to defeat him, and he wanted to know who and what I was. Then I made the mistake of talking in Parseltongue, and he decided that I must be related to him somehow. He's mentioned an inheritance test more than once."

Remus rubbed his hand over his eyes as he tried to decipher the cryptic sentences. Finally he asked, "Who is Salazar?"

"Oh," Harry said with some embarrassment. "Um...oh hell." He pointed to the portrait over the fireplace and said, "Remus, meet Salazar Slytherin. Salazar, this is Remus Lupin, my adopted godfather."

Remus stared at the handsome dark-haired man smirking down at him and had to chuckle. "Of course, only you would find a previously unknown portrait of a Founder and use him as an advisor."

"I also have been teaching the scalawag basic wizarding etiquette and have raised his awareness of politics. His world's classes are sadly lacking. In between, we are working on basic warding lessons as well."

Remus looked between the portrait and the teenager. "Well, if you have to learn politics, at least you are learning from a master."

Harry relaxed when Remus accepted his relationship with the Founder even as the portrait smirked. "When you have gotten through the emotional reunion, you might show Mr. Lupin your research findings regarding the current Lord Slytherin."

"My pleasure, sir," Remus responded. Just what had his cub gotten into, he wondered. Instead of focusing on that, he moved to his next question. "What do you know about the ritual that summoned you here, Harry?"

"Well, supposedly it was only supposed to summon someone capable of defeating Slytherin and someone who was willing to leave their current situation. Considering my time at Club Voldemort, I definitely fit the second half. Since I killed Voldemort in our world, I guess I could fit the first part as well. The ritual had a blood component involved. One member of the summoning team was supposed to provide seven drops of blood as a focus for the summoning, so that the 'champion' would be inclined to protect and assist that person."

Remus narrowed his eyes and Harry had to give a short huff of agreement. "Yeah, I wasn't thrilled to hear that. Neville Longbottom's blood was supposed to be used, but he left the dagger across the room, so Sebastian Potter used his blood. Salazar and I figure that's why the ritual targeted another Potter as the supposed champion."

At Remus' encouraging nod he continued, "Apparently, the blood component had another side effect. I woke up one night and found myself drawn to the Quidditch pitch, only to find an unconscious Sebastian Potter. Apparently, I am 'inclined' to protect and assist him."

Remus sat back and closed his eyes while he considered the ramifications of this information. He looked up at the portrait and asked, "Are you very familiar with blood magic, Lord Slytherin?"

"Blood Rituals was a basic class when Hogwarts first accepted students. It is only in the last several generations that the Ministry declared all blood magic dark instead of evaluating the intent. Why do you ask?"

Remus looked at Harry apologetically. "I have to wonder whether the blood magic invoked will require Harry to fulfill whatever Sebastian Potter was focused on during the summoning ritual."

"Ah, a very good question, Mr. Lupin," Salazar responded as he inclined his head in acknowledgement of a fellow intellectual. "Until you appeared, I was not confident that a means would be discovered to return Mr. Potter to his original reality. However, now that you have shown the portal can be reopened, that does raise a number of questions to be considered. Our first issue would be to discover just what young Sebastian Potter was thinking during the ritual."

"Oh bloody hell," Harry muttered. "I hope it was just 'help Neville'." He put his face in his hands and continued in a muffled voice, "But I'll bet my last knut that it was more like 'save us all from whatever happens to be threatening our society'."

"The later would seem to be more in accordance with your history," Salazar responded with wicked mirth.

"Merlin, I'm doomed," Harry grumbled.

Remus leaned over and rubbed his back. "But at least you're not alone. We'll get through it together."

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Author's Note: I try to respond to each and every review. However, with the recent site changes, I can no longer respond to feedback where the reviewer does not permit Private Messaging.

Chapter 18 – What Was He Thinking?

In the last chapter:

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Remus leaned over and rubbed his back. "But at least you're not alone. We'll get through it together."

Harry stood and straightened his shoulders. "We're not going to solve the blood ritual question right this minute, so I'm not going to dwell on it until I have to. I suppose we should go see Dumbledore. He knows who I really am." He suddenly turned towards Remus with wide eyes.

"Remus, you should know that Sirius is the DADA professor here. Are you ready to see him?"

"How did you handle seeing the image of your godfather again," he asked Harry gently. "It must have been hard."

"There are so many dead people walking around, it's a constant shock," the teen admitted. "Dumbledore, the Potters – they had twins after their Harry died, Sirius...Cedric Diggory never died and there was never a Tri-Wizard Tournament here."

"Why did you decide to use an alias," asked Remus curiously. "Why not admit to being Harry Potter?"

"When I first woke up, I was really confused Remus. The last I knew I had just killed Voldemort and suddenly I woke up in the Hogwarts Infirmary with dead people talking to me. I figured the Death Eaters had found me and were running a huge deception to break me for killing their boss. I thought that if I gave them another name, their expressions would give them away, so I called myself Harrison Black."

Remus nodded, "That makes sense. But then why continue after you realized you were actually in a different world?"

Harry sat down again and rubbed his hand across his eyes. "I won't diminish my parent's sacrifice, Moony. They died for me and I can't take the place of this other James' and Lily's dead son. You know my past; I wasn't raised in a loving magical family like their son would have been. I was hated my entire childhood, and then alternately praised or condemned. These Potters would have expectations about how a son of theirs would have turned out, and I...I'm not up to trying to meet their expectations or facing their disappointment because I'm not what they need me to be."

Remus moved to the teen's chair and wrapped an arm around his shoulder. "I understand. It was hard looking at copies of my old friends, but you're right. They died in October of 1981." He let Harry compose himself before asking, "What is this Sirius like?"

"He was an Auror and became the DADA teacher when his leg was permanently damaged by a curse. He didn't spend twelve years in Azkaban and is a more mature version of the man we knew, but he still enjoys pranks. Oh...he and Snape actually are civil to one another!"

Remus gave a wolfish grin. "Now that's something I would like to see!"

"This Snape wasn't repeatedly targeted by the Marauders and didn't become a bitter man. He's still sarcastic and can probably flay you with his words, but the really nasty edge is gone."

"I look forward to meeting him, then. So that I don't reveal anything by mistake, tell me again who knows that you are Harry Potter instead of Harrison Black?"

"I was meeting with Albus, Sirius and Severus when Peter came in with his copy of the Marauder's map and it showed me as Harry Potter. So those four know and I shared some of the high points of my history with them." He grimaced and added, "I think the kids that summoned me may be suspicious, though. They have their own version of Hermione after all."

He stood up again. "Merlin, it's almost lunch time. We've been in here for hours. Shall we go to the Great Hall for lunch and meet up with Albus? I'll ask him if you can stay here with me. We can add another bed or maybe we can convince Hogwarts to add another room to these quarters."

Remus placed a gentle hand on the teen's shoulder. "Are you ready to face a busy Great Hall, cub?"

Harry gave the older man an embarrassed smile before he ducked his head. "I'm back in control again. Besides, if the Potters saw him, he's probably waiting for us. The big question is whether you're ready to see Sirius? He's usually at every meal."

"Well, if Severus is there as well and is anything like ours was, he probably carries Calming Draughts on him if I need one."

Harry grinned at him. "I think it's almost required of Potions Masters. They get their diploma and are told to 'go forth and drug the masses!'"

Remus chuckled and hugged the teen again. "I'm so glad to see you, Cub." He released him before either became emotional and added, "Lead on, Mr. Black."

Harry led them to the door behind the staff table and allowed Remus to look out at the faces on the staff table. Albus, Minerva, Filius Severus, and Sirius were all dead in their world, but were alive here

and Harry knew how shocking it was at first. The Potters weren't at the table, and Harry assumed they had left for their jobs. He waited until Remus took several deep breaths and then nodded to the younger man. Together they came through the doorway.

Albus saw them and smiled a welcome at the older version of his former student. With a wave of his wand, two chairs appeared across from him, their backs to the students. "Sit down and join us, my boys!"

Sirius looked up from his place further down the table and stared at the image of his former friend. Albus had sent him a note saying that Remus Lupin from Harry's world had arrived, but he still couldn't believe that he was seeing the image of his old friend.

Remus looked up and met the gray eyes of Sirius Black and quickly realized that this man didn't have the haunted look in his eyes and his face was mostly unlined, whereas his old friend bore the imprint of Azkaban in his features. He nodded at him and mouthed, "Later". To his surprise, Sirius blinked and then nodded before deliberately turning and starting a conversation with Filius Flitwick.

Severus Snape stared intently at Remus for several moments, as if cataloging his appearance, before returning his attention to his plate. He certainly wouldn't fuel any student gossip by showing any interest at the stranger's arrival, although he was certain that at least his Slytherins noticed a new arrival.

In the meantime, Remus turned back to the Headmaster and recognized that both he and Minerva were noting the differences in him and the young man they knew. "Headmaster, Professor," he said politely, inclining his head to the both of them. "You are both looking well."

"It is a true pleasure to meet you, Mr. Lupin," Albus said with a open smile, his blue eyes sparkling behind half-moon spectacles. "I can understand why our young friend here was so disconcerted when he first arrived. It is quite...uncanny seeing an older version of a young man that I know passed away many years ago."

Remus nodded in understanding. "We haven't had the opportunity for a truly in-depth discussion yet, but I have to admit to having the same feeling as you, Headmaster. It is exceedingly strange yet

astonishingly satisfying to see everyone here looking so fit and healthy."

Albus drew his wand and covertly set up a privacy ward around the three of them, smiling apologetically at Minerva when she was excluded from the conversation. "James and Lily told me that you were able to open a portal between our worlds, which is how you ended up in their home. Do you think this is something that can be repeated from this world to send you and young Mr. Black home?"

The younger man was relieved to see that Albus seemed sincerely interested in helping send the young man home. He also noticed that Harry was paying close attention to their conversation and raised an eyebrow to ask how much he should share. A brief nod indicated that Remus could proceed, although he wouldn't be surprised if Harry interrupted him if he was about to share something the younger man didn't want the others knowing.

"I have a large number of research notes with me, as well as several theories that need to be proven," responded Remus to Albus' question. "One proposition was that Harry's friends in our world would open a portal once a week in the same location, and hopefully Harry and I would be there and able to return. That would obviously inconvenience the Potters, as our portal opens in their basement. A theory was proposed that suggested that the people that summoned Harry to begin with would be needed to recreate the ritual in this world. A second theory is that any group of powerful enough witches and wizards could open the portal, but that it's the focus that makes the difference, and the person being sent through would be the focus." He looked at Harry who nodded encouragingly.

"However, with what Harry shared of the ritual, I have a new theory to investigate. I'm not very familiar with blood rituals as they are frowned on by the Ministry in our world, but I still have a concern that if the person whose blood was used in the original ritual focused on specific expectations for the one being summoned, then Harry might have to fulfill those expectations before Magic permits him to leave."

Albus frowned and stroked his beard thoughtfully. "Blood rituals are not frowned upon by our Ministry as long as the blood is willingly donated. I have to admit that these rituals are no longer taught at Hogwarts, but that is simply because different and usually simpler

alternatives were offered. I will have to research it myself, and you are certainly welcome to use our library for your own research, Mr. Lupin. Perhaps it wouldn't be amiss to inquire of Mr. Potter just what he focused on during the ritual as well."

Remus smiled at the elderly wizard. "Thank you, Headmaster. We appreciate your support."

"Not at all. After all, Mr. Black didn't ask to be brought here."

"Remus knows that you, Sirius, Severus and Peter know my full identity, Headmaster," Harry said quietly. "Although I do prefer that everyone avoids thinking of me as a Potter to avoid any slip ups."

"Of course, dear boy," Albus responded with a nod.

"There's one other thing, sir," Harry said hesitantly. "I would like to invite Remus to stay with me here at Hogwarts. He came prepared with Wolfsbane potion for the full moon, so no one will be in any danger. We can spend the full moon in the Room of Requirements or even at the Shrieking Shack for added security if you wish."

Albus looked at the two over his glasses and nodded slowly. "I think I can convince Hogwarts to add another room to your quarters, but we'll need an identity for him as well as a plausible reason for him to be here if the Board of Governors questions his appearance."

"As Mr. Black is the Assistant Quidditch Coach as he prepares for his NEWTs, perhaps I could be a private tutor hired to help prepare him for the exams," proposed Remus. "Although my counterpart died in this world, I bear enough of a resemblance that no one would be surprised if I were a Lupin cousin, perhaps from another country?"

"If you will develop an appropriate alias, I will see what I can do to ensure the proper documentation is put in place," suggested Albus. "Why don't you come visit me in my office after dinner tonight?"

Harry beamed a smile at the elderly wizard. "Thank you, Headmaster!" He turned to Remus and said, "Come on, Moony. You can watch the Gryffindor Quidditch practice."

Remus shifted on the hard bench in the stands as he watched Harry fly around the Quidditch pitch, offering advice to the different players as they practiced. He heard a creak from a nearby wooden step, but didn't take his eyes from the boy, assuming it was a student coming to watch.

"He's a remarkable flyer, isn't he," said an unforgettable voice. Remus spun around, unprepared for the familiar sight of Sirius Black at that moment. "Of course, James was always an excellent flyer as well. I heard that Harry was selected for the Gryffindor Quidditch team in his First Year."

Remus nodded slowly, "Youngest Seeker in a century; never lost a match that year either."

Sirius' grey eyes moved slowly over his face. "You have more scars than our Moony did," he noted sadly.

The werewolf glanced away. "I couldn't always afford Wolfsbane potion," he admitted.

Sirius stood and moved down so that he was sitting next to Remus. "I'm sorry that we...our counterparts...weren't there for you, Moony. No one deserves to be alone." He looked at the other man with suspiciously bright eyes. "Our Remus was watching Harry when both were killed. He was only twenty-one...so young...too young to die. We were all devastated."

The other man swallowed hard. "It must have been hard losing both Harry and your Remus at the same time."

Sirius nodded. "I imagine it was as difficult as it was for you to lose both James and Lily, and then think that I betrayed them and murdered Peter. I don't know if I could have survived that."

A smile tugged unexpectedly at Remus' lips. "I never expected to hear such wisdom and maturity from Sirius Black," he responded with a slight smile.

"Ouch," the other man responded using a fist to strike his chest. "A blow right to the heart! Accusing me of being serious?"

Remus groaned at the familiar pun. "I'll try not to make such rash judgments again," he replied rolling his eyes.

Sirius grinned at him, and Remus felt a moment of déjà vu, almost as if a younger Sirius was about to suggest a prank. "Peter visits regularly, and I didn't want either of you blindsided by running into the other in the hallways unprepared, so I let him know that you were here. He would like to meet you, but he said he will understand if you prefer not to see him. Harry had a hard time seeing him, but I understand his counterpart not only betrayed James and Lily, but tortured the pup while he was in captivity."

Remus found himself forcing back a growl at the thought of Wormtail. "I know that he's not the same person. Harry said he even offered a wizard's oath...but I don't know if I could control Moony if he saw the rat."

Sirius nodded, "Fair enough. I'll let Twitch know. He didn't expect anything different, to be honest. He said he would have had to be restrained from killing anyone who acted as his counterpart did. Even though it wasn't him, he feels responsible for the other Peter somehow."

Remus arched eyebrow in disbelief, and Sirius added, "Honestly, and I could relate to his feelings. I was horrified to discover that my other self led Severus to you on a full moon. Merlin, your Sirius must have been more affected by his Black upbringing than I was." He shook his head and peered into the other man's face. "I would never have put you at such risk, Moony. Both you and Severus could have been killed. I don't know what the other Sirius was thinking. Albus was also appalled to discover that your Dumbledore permitted the Marauders such free reign in the school."

Remus sat back in surprise and then considered his school years. The Marauders would have been called bullies if James and Sirius hadn't been so charming and likeable. They shouldn't have been allowed to target the Slytherins or Severus like they had, using pranks designed to humiliate others. He had apologized to his world's Severus when they were both in the Order in the second war, but the spy's bitterness was too deeply ingrained for forgiveness.

Sirius pointed up at the Gryffindor Quidditch team. "See the Chasers? The twins are James' and Lily's. They're named Sebastian and Holly."

Remus watched the two flyers, trying to make out their faces. He could only see auburn hair at the moment, indicating they had inherited their hair from Lily rather than James. "Harry said the ritual they used to summon him made some type of link to Sebastian; that he woke up and had to go out to the Quidditch pitch, where he found Sebastian injured."

"Lily chewed him out quite thoroughly for flying alone in the dark," Sirius said with a smirk at Lily's famous temper, before thinking about what the other man had actually said. "I know that the twins are wondering whether using Sebastian's blood caused some unseen effects. They wanted to nick my copy of the Maruader's map to see what name appeared under Harry, so they definitely have some suspicions. I sent them away after chewing them out for disregarding Harry's privacy and notified Peter in case they tried for his map. Good thing too; the brats Floo-called him while we were still talking over the enchanted mirrors."

"You still have and use those mirrors? The same ones we made at school?" At Sirius' nod, Remus couldn't help but chuckle. "We should have gone into business selling those. We would probably have made a fortune."

"Nah, it was more fun to keep them to ourselves," grinned Sirius.

"Thinking of keeping things to yourself, are you married, Sirius? Any little Padfoots at home?" Remus grinned at the horror that immediately appeared on the other's face.

The two men were so involved in their conversation that they failed to note that the practice had ended, until they heard Harry's voice a few feet above them. He hovered on his broom and said, "Don't you have an afternoon class, Sirius?"

The DADA instructor cast a quick Tempus and then swore colorfully before he took off running towards the school. He turned after a few steps, but continued running backwards as he shouted, "You and me and some fire whiskey soon, Moony!" He turned again and continued his dash towards the school.

Harry watched the other man running and then chuckled as Sirius reached the steps and then assumed a more dignified manner as he entered the school. He looked at Remus and said, "It's good to see him without the aftereffects of Azkaban."

"Agreed," Remus said as he stood and brushed off his robes. "I wish our Sirius could have had the same opportunities."

Harry smiled at him, and responded, "I'm just glad I had the chance to know him at all, damaged or not. Even so, it's good to see how he could have been." He landed and put the broom over his shoulder as the two turned and headed back to the castle.

After a few minutes of silence, Remus said hesitantly, "Sirius mentioned...Peter." He tried not to growl at the name, but wasn't totally successful. "I don't think I'm up to meeting him yet...maybe not ever." He looked over at the teen, "I know you made your peace with him."

Harry nodded and laid a hand on the other man's shoulder. "I understand your feeling, Moony. I wanted to hex first and ask questions later at first, but I gave him a chance. He doesn't even look like our world's Wormtail." He couldn't help but sneer the hated name. "This man is slimmer and trimmer. He carries himself with more confidence. He stood up to James and Sirius for the both of us, which is saying something. I think he really thought of your counterpart as a brother. But from the little I know of him, he'll respect your wishes and if you don't want to see him, he'll try to stay out of your way."

Remus shook his head at the concept of Peter Pettigrew thinking of him as a brother and said, "I'll have to think about it some more, Cub. At the moment, I would prefer to avoid him, I think."

After dinner, Harry and Remus followed Albus to his office. Remus glanced around the room, noticing the differences in the room. There were none of the little whirling instruments that their Albus used to keep track of key individuals.

"Sit down, gentlemen," Albus said with a smile. "Have you developed a background story yet for Mr. Lupin?"

"Yes sir," smiled Remus. "One of my Mother's brothers emigrated to New Zealand, so I will be Regis Lupin, a third cousin of this world's Remus Lupin. I was raised in Auckland and attended Muggle schools for basic education and was home-schooled for my magical training. I make my living as a tutor for both Muggle and Magical families, depending on what needs to be taught. I was here on vacation and Harry hired me as a tutor to help prepare for his NEWTs, as he didn't want to encroach on the Hogwarts professors." He smiled at a memory and added, "In fact, I met a Maori shaman when I was younger and became interested in his culture. I should be able to speak intelligently about the country and the magical community there."

"New Zealand is a good choice," Albus agreed. "Because the wizard and witches that emigrated there accepted the Muggle cultures more readily, the traditionalists in our society have ignored them to a large extent. They will have few contacts to follow up on your credentials, and the government relations aren't the best, so even the Minister of Magic's office will be unlikely to garner any information on you." He smiled in approval and repeated, "A very good choice, indeed."

Remus inclined his head, "Thank you Headmaster. Now, for a more immediate concern....the blood ritual used to summon Harry. We would like to know what Sebastian Potter was concentrating on during the ritual. Perhaps he was focusing just on the words and his magic, but we need to understand what his intent and expectations were."

Albus nodded in understanding. "After you mentioned it at lunch, I spoke with Severus who has done the most research for us. He agreed with you that young Mr. Potter's intent may play an important part in whether Mr. Black will be able to return home."

Harry slumped in his chair and shook his head. "Why is it always me," he wondered.

Remus laid a hand on the teen's arm and squeezed it in empathy. He looked at the elderly wizard and asked, "Who will speak with Mr. Potter about his thoughts during the ritual?"

"I will take on that duty," offered the Headmaster. "He will likely focus more with me and feel less guilty that he would with Mr.

Black." The younger men nodded their acceptance. "I also believe an additional bedchamber should now be attached to your quarters, and Nebby seemed quite pleased to gather furniture from storage to equip it."

"Thank you, sir," Harry said with some relief. "We appreciate your consideration."

"Not at all, Harry," responded the elderly wizard. "I will make arrangements to speak with Sebastian as soon as possible and let you know the outcome."

Although Harry recognized the comment as a dismissal, he said quickly, "Headmaster, I have a question that you may be able to answer. Do you have the time?"

"Yes, of course," the older man said with a smile. "How may I help you?"

"It's about a witch named Luna Lovegood. She was a year below me at Hogwarts, but become one of my better friends. However, I haven't seen her counterpart here and wondered if she was being home schooled."

The Headmaster's smile had dropped at the mention of the young witch and he sighed heavily. "I am sorry to have to be the one to tell you this, but the Lovegood family suffered an immense tragedy about six years ago. Selene Lovegood was a brilliant witch with a profound interest in spell-crafting. She even had a shielded room built in their home where she could experiment. Unfortunately, a spell she was creating destabilized...Selene was killed, while nine year old Luna was caught in the backlash. She's been in St. Mungo's long-term spell damage ward ever since that heartbreaking event, in a comatose state."

Harry grieved that the beautiful young woman with the serene disposition and many eccentric beliefs and qualities had never had the chance to grow up here. He looked at the Headmaster, "There's no chance of recovery?"

"There is always a chance, Harry," the elderly wizard said softly. "We must always retain hope."

"Yes, sir," Harry said quietly, knowing that Neville and his Gran had never given up their hope for Frank and Alice Longbottom.

The two younger men stood returned to Harry's quarters. "I'm sorry about Luna," said Remus. "It's hard to imagine a world without her peaceful and unique outlook on life."

"Maybe her father didn't have the funds for specialists," Harry murmured. "I'll have to take another look in the Daily Oracle archives to see if it says anything."

He paused in his walk through the room when he realized another door had appeared. "Hey Remus, check it out."

Remus opened the door to discover a new bedroom, already furnished with a bed, dresser and mirror. The walls were a warm cream, while the bedspread was blue and cream. A small pop was heard behind them and Harry turned to see a bashful Nebby looking up at them.

"Nebby wasn't sure what Mr. Lupin sir wanted in his room. Nebby went through all of the mattresses in storage and thought this was the best and the frame is sturdy and well-made. However, if the Master Wizard will let Nebby know his needs, she will be happy to find different furniture."

The werewolf smiled warmly at the house elf. "This is perfect, Nebby. I wouldn't change a thing."

"Mr. Lupin is a very kind wizard," replied the furiously blushing house elf. "Master wizards is to be calling Nebby if they are needing anything," she reminded them before she popped away.

"You better rest up, Moony," suggested Harry with a furtive smile. "Sirius won't give you more than a day to recuperate from getting here before he drags you away for that encounter of the alcoholic kind. And you'll probably want to see Severus before then for a Hangover potion." He left the room with a smirk, leaving Moony making silent promises not to have more than one drink with Sirius-drink-you-under-the-table-Black.

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Sebastian shifted uncomfortably in the chair and stared down at his hands. He didn't know why he had been summoned to the Headmaster's office, but Professor McGonagall had been quite insistent he appear immediately after dinner. Now he just wished the old man would say something!

He jerked when the elderly wizard began, "Mr. Potter, I asked you to come here tonight because I have a question about the blood ritual used to summon Mr. Black."

"Sir?" Sebastian was confused. "Wouldn't Hermione be the best one to answer questions, sir," he protested.

"No, Mr. Potter, because this question relates specifically to you. As you know, Mr. Black seems to be somewhat tied to you, as evidenced by his being drawn to the Quidditch pitch when you were injured. What I am trying to investigate is whether there are any other side effects. Towards that end, I would like to ask you whether you had any specific intentions or expectations as you participated in the ritual?"

Sebastian looked at the brilliant blue eyes in confusion. "Intentions, sir? Our intent was to perform the ritual and summon a champion. The runes had our expectations as to the type of person it would be. Um, I think we agreed on courage, strength...um...power and compassion." "What else did the headmaster want from him," he wondered.

"I understand," the Headmaster responded soothingly. "However, at any time during the ritual did you think about what you hoped the 'champion' would accomplish? Did you think about your hopes for the outcome?"

Sebastian frowned as he thought. "I honestly don't know, sir," he said reluctantly. "I may have. I know I was concentrating on the ritual and getting the incantation correct, but I couldn't say whether I had any other thoughts."

Albus leaned back and sighed in disappointment. "Tell me, Mr. Potter, would you object to having me scan your memory of that night?" At Sebastian's look of shock and discomfort, he immediately added, "I wouldn't look at anything else, only the ritual itself, you have my word on it."

"I suppose it would be all right," Sebastian said slowly. "What would I have to do?"

"Before anything, I need your parent's permission," Albus responded. At Sebastian's look of surprise, he added, "It would be highly improper for me to scan the memories of minor even with your permission. We need the permission of at least one of your parents as well."

"It's past dinner, so they are both likely at home if you want to Floo them," the teen suggested. He wasn't sure whether he wanted his parents to agree or deny the request. He didn't like the idea of anyone poking around in his memories, but he also thought they owed Harrison Black a lot. Besides, what if he had somehow hoped that a Potter would come through? Maybe this would solve whether Harrison Black was really Harry Potter.

He was surprised to realize that the Headmaster had Floo-called his parents while he was thinking. Only the flare of the fire brought his attention back to the room, as his parents both stepped through.

Lily looked her son over carefully before asking, "Are you willing to have the Headmaster examine your memories of the ritual?"

"Yes, Mum," he responded. "I owe it to Mr. Black if there's the chance of the ritual effecting him in any other way."

She smiled and laid a hand on his shoulder, while his father ruffled his hair. "That's my boy," he said quietly, but with pride.

"Very well, Mr. Potter, if you would focus on the night of the ritual and look at me, I'll examine your memories of the event, even those you may have forgotten. You might feel a mental tickle, but this shouldn't hurt at all."

Sebastian looked into the bright blue eyes of the Headmaster and thought about the night of the ritual.

The teens had all arrived at seven o'clock as planned. Their parents were all at Hogwarts for a meeting with the Headmaster. Neville looked anxious, while Ron appeared both tense and determined. Hermione looked very serious and held a bag in her hands. The

twins led them down to the storage room which they had rearranged to push everything against the wall, leaving a large portion of the stone floor visible.

Hermione withdrew chalk and drew the pentagram on the floor with meticulous care, while the twins added the runes around the pentagram. Sebastian swore softly when he caught his hand the sharp edge of his belt buckle and a red welt appeared, but he continued drawing the runes. When he and Holly were finished, Neville took the salt and spread it in a circle around the symbol. Hermione pulled the silver dagger from her bag and then set both items aside.

"We've rehearsed this enough, so everyone knows the incantation and what to do, right? Is anyone uncomfortable with the incantation? Are there any questions?" The other teens nodded or shook their head in response to the questions, while Ron rolled his eyes behind Hermione's back. "OK, let's take our places then."

Sebastian stood across from Ron Weasley and wondered what it would have been like if Ron had been Rita Skeeter's focus all those years. With five older brothers, he probably would have had the support he needed to get through it, rather than Neville who was an only child. The Weasley twins would probably have pranked her unmercifully for targeting their brother. He wondered briefly what it would have been like if his own older brother had survived, but left that thought when Neville dropped his hand and they all began to chant the incantation.

He hoped this would work. Neville lacked the self-confidence needed to grow into the idol that Rita Skeeter tried to make him and every article made it worse, causing his sensitive friend to become withdrawn and guilty for situations beyond his control. He waited for Neville to add the seven drops of blood to the pentagram and then turned to look when Neville gave a gasp. He followed Neville's dismayed stare across the room, and realized that he had left the dagger there. None of them could leave the pentagram or the spell would be interrupted with who knows what repercussions, nor could they summon the dagger as that would also interrupt the ritual.

As Neville looked both guilty and defeated, Sebastian's eyes dropped to his hands, wondering what they should do. He saw the red welt across the back of his hand and smiled as he realized he

had a solution. There was no way he was going to let this ritual fail. He dragged his finger hard across the sharp edge of the buckle, and watched the blood rise to the surface. He reached his hand out and allowed the blood to fall into the pentagram. "We need to find a champion to help defeat the Blood Purists," he thought fiercely. "It's not fair that everyone thinks Neville should solve society's problems. He doesn't have a big family to support him, not like Ron." Even as he counted the drops, he wondered again what life would have been like for Holly and him if their older brother had survived.

The chanting continued and the teens felt the magic grow around them and the runes began to glow. The pressure built until it was difficult to draw enough breath to continue the incantation. With an ear-splitting crack of thunder and a blinding flash of light, the pressure was abruptly released as a large object fell into the center of the pentagram. They stared in horror at the bloody and gruesome body that now lay before them.

Sebastian blinked as the memory stopped and he re-focused on the Headmaster. James took a step towards the elderly wizard and said, "Well?"

"Your son was quite concerned for his friend and what he perceived as a need for a champion to help defeat the Blood Purists," the elderly wizard said quietly.

"Is that all," asked Lily. "Will that have any impact as to whether Mr. Black can return to his home?"

"The only other thoughts your son had during the ritual was about the difference in Mr. Weasley coming from a large family with many brothers to support him, while Mr. Longbottom is an only child and he and Holly were without siblings," Albus admitted.

"That's not quite everything though," Sebastian said guiltily. His parents turned to look at him, and he gulped before continuing, "I couldn't help but wonder what it would have been like for Holly and me if...if Harry had lived." He immediately felt guilty at seeing the look of pain that crossed his mother's face. "I forgot about anything like that when he appeared though. He was so bloody...we thought he was dead. I can close my eyes and still see and smell the stench of the blood and injuries sometimes." He felt his mother's arms around him and shook his head at the offered comfort.

"We didn't think it was right that Neville was expected to solve the problem with the Blood Purists, but what did we do? We put those same expectations on someone else who wasn't involved. I don't know how he's forgiven us. I don't think I could have."

"He is a fine young man," agreed Albus as he tried to shift any thoughts away from the eldest Potter child. "What we need to do is determine whether Mr. Potter's hope for a champion to defeat the Blood Purists will prevent Mr. Black from returning home."

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